



Horses and Kids: A Positive Pairing!

by Christy Douglass

A part of Harmony Acres mission has always been to make horses and other animals accessible to children who might not otherwise be able to have this positive experience. In recreational programming, Harmony Acres benefits regular children in the community through the positive connection with horses and ponies.

Harmony Acres currently offers several programs in conjunction with Grand Junction Parks and Recreation, including Harmony Horsemanship--A

class offering ground work and basic riding skills to children age 9 and up; and I Love Ponies! Club--a class for children as young as 5 to experience basic horse skills through working with miniature horses and ponies. Harmony Acres also has a year-round Equestrian Vaulting Program that is open to children age 4 and up. Equestrian Vaulting offers a very unique confidence building opportunity for children, as it offers a combination of gymnastics and dance--all atop a horse's back.

The classes through Grand Junction Parks and Rec are generally 6-week sessions, 1 hour per week, with 6-8 kids able to participate. Equestrian Vaulting sessions are held weekly for 1-2 hours and have room for as many as 10-15 kids at once, who have to either



New Staff from left to right: Karen Caton, Tiana Mihalich, Kristin Moore

New Full-Time Staff

Last year one of Harmony Acres' goals was to begin hiring full-time staff instead of contractors. Full-time staff require a larger budget, but allow for more program stability and an ability to serve more client needs in the community. Our goal was three new positions. We are very excited to report that we met our fundraising goals and have been able to add the following individuals to our team:

Office Manager

Meet Karen Caton! Karen began her service at Harmony Acres as an animal-care volunteer for the past three years, and has a varied resume that includes everything from animal care to office management to Quality Assurance Inspector for aviation landing gear! Karen started her part time position of office manager at the beginning of the

year and we cannot remember what life was like without her!

Therapeutic Riding Instructor

Welcome Tiana Mihalich! Tiana joined us in February and immediately began training under Morgan to learn the details of Therapeutic Riding. She has submitted all of her session hours and training to become PATH (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship) certified and began leading sessions in May.

Mental Health Therapist

Welcome Krisin Moore! Kristin moved all the way from Tennessee to join our team! A Masters Degree in Social Work with an emphasis in Veterinary Social Work allowed her to hit the ground running when she joined us in August.

We are very excited for the additional stability and increased client care that these individuals bring to our programming!



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take turns on the horse and practice barrel, or work together in pairs or groups of three in team routines.

The team work and social aspects of the programs provide for increased pro-social skills and confidence. "I see the kids build more confidence. I also see them become better at recognizing the horses' feelings. . .which I think also helps them recognize their own feelings better," says Josie Robinson, lead instructor.

Class fees are kept low so they are affordable to parents. This year Harmony Acres expects to benefit at least 90 local youth through 150 (group) hours of recreational programming.

For more information, visit www.harmonyacresec.org



Volunteer Spotlight: Paula and Geranimo

If you come out to Harmony Acres on a Wednesday morning you are likely to be greeted by Paula and Geranimo doing their “Wednesday Walkabouts.” Paula first met Geranimo when she began her volunteer service at Harmony Acres as a pen cleaner. Paula describes that she was going through a difficult time at the beginning of her volunteering: having ended a long-term marriage and moved across country to begin anew. She immediately found that her animal time at Harmony was “good for the soul.”

Paula soon found she had a few physical limitations in pen cleaning due to arthritis, but, Program Director Morgan Kareus noticed the bond between her and Geranimo, and suggested that the two begin walking together to help Geranimo with his own physical difficulties (A condition called DSLD that causes ligament degeneration and pain in his hind legs when standing too long.) Thus, the Wednesday Walkabouts were born.



Paula's mom and horse circa 1940's



Photos by Adrianna Steggall with Trujillo Media

“At first Geranimo (a 17.2 hand warmblood) would put his head all the way up when I tried to halter him,” Paula explained, “But then he began realizing he enjoyed our time together and would put his head all the way down for me. Now the only time he raises his head is when I walk him out through the pasture area, and he holds it proudly, as if he is reliving his glory days.”

A big part of the benefit of the walks for both Paula and Geranimo are the social time they experience with others. “Geranimo is very insistent that we go over and interact with everyone on the grounds when we are walking” Paula explains. “He really enjoys saying hi to everyone.”

Paula has been able to observe Geranimo's therapy skills in action: one day when another facility animal passed away unexpectedly--on a Wednesday--she had Geranimo out and many staff and volunteers came up to hug him and receive comfort from him. “He was there to support everyone.” Paula says.

Recently one of Paula's friends had an idea that she should try to replicate an old photo of Paula's mom with Geranimo. “The original photo was taken in the 1940's” Paula explains, “probably around the time my Dad went to World War II.” The horse in the photo is a Saddlebred, her father had trained Saddlebreds on their farm in Illinois. Paula, however, had moved away from her relationship with horses when she moved to the city following college, not to revisit it until coming to Harmony Acres 50 years later.

The results of the photo shoot (you can see yourself on this page) were not exactly what Paula had expected; but she is still getting a good laugh out of Geranimo's version of posing. “We might try again with my daughter” Paula laughs, explaining her daughter's youth might better represent her mother's age at the time. But for now she is pleased with the results of the shoot, and has even ordered a new pair of socks with Geranimo's likeness from the photo--tongue included.



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