

EQUICENTER POST

2006

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EQUICENTER

SECOND ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

HIPPOTHERAPY COMES TO THE EQUICENTER

PRALID

A HOME OF OUR OWN

NORMAN HOWARD SCHOOL

POST





FOUNDERS' COLUMN

Since our last anniversary, we are pleased to update you with some very exciting developments. Most notably, the EquiCenter purchased the facility and property where we had been operating since our beginning just over two years ago. With

this big step, we now control our own destiny and momentum, guaranteeing the continuity of service to those who have become dependent upon our programs.

We also have expanded our programming to include hippotherapy, and the number of agencies participating in this community-wide, collaborative effort continues to grow. We are enhancing our existing programming with Easter Seals of New York and the Golisano Children's Hospital at Strong, and the Norman Howard School

has made EquiCenter programming part of its school curriculum for selected students. We have also met with administrators from the Wilson Commencement Park to develop a pilot program for teenagers in search of alternative opportunities. Additionally we are extremely pleased and grateful to report that we now have over 150 volunteers assisting with lessons, horse care, facility maintenance, governance, media & communications and fundraising. The EquiCenter truly could not have

realized its success without our volunteers! A heartfelt thanks to all of you who make the EquiCenter what it is day in and day out...

In 2005, we met financial goals, and raised the \$100,000 needed to secure an additional \$50,000 challenge grant. We have continued our financial growth in 2006 with increased support from foundations, corporate sponsors, private donors and from our wildly successful first annual EquiTrials Trail Trial benefit event. We are

also pleased to acknowledge our recent certification as a new United Way donor - designation-eligible agency. However, while we continue to increase the number of participants we are able to serve, unfortunately we still have waiting lists for both

our riding and mental health programs. As we work tirelessly to find new ways to increase our capacity to serve a great number of individuals in need, we will continue to reach out to this caring and generous community for more volunteers and even greater financial and in-kind donations.

As we conclude our second full year of programming, we are very excited about the future of the EquiCenter. We continue to serve more people with the same expertise and compassion that made our first year so successful, and are confident we will continue this trend into 2007 and beyond. Thank you for being in the saddle with

us on this exciting ride and for your support of the EquiCenter's mission to improve

Cover photograph: Matt Wittmeyer

WHAT WE'RE ALL ABOUT

The EquiCenter is a non-profit center that uses a wide range of equine therapeutic activities to foster the personal growth and individual achievement of people with disabilities and at-risk youth. Our current programs include Therapeutic Riding, Vaulting, Hippotherapy and Horsemanship (Equine-Facilitated Mental Health). Future plans include the addition of Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy, Carriage Driving, and Canine-Assisted Therapy.

Our new Hippotherapy Program utilizes the multidimensional movement of the horse to provide a unique and motivating physical therapy. These sessions are taught by licensed therapists who are also certified by the American Hippotherapy Association. Riders in our Therapeutic Riding and Vaulting Programs participate in structured classes to acquire horsemanship skills while developing flexibility, motor skills, balance, muscle coordination, strength, and increased self-esteem and confidence.

Participants in our Horsemanship Program learn experientially by working directly with horses. In this non-riding program, individuals develop personal responsibility, relationship and communication skills, an appreciation for teamwork, self-discipline, and trust. Through their activities, participants develop a sense of purpose as they help care for horses who are in turn caring for individuals with disabilities.

For more information about



We are proud to be a member of the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA).

HIPPOTHERAPY COMES TO THE EQUICENTER

“It is never easy to hear that your child has a disability,” wrote Joanne LaMonica in her recent letter to EquiCenter. “As a parent, your hopes and dreams for your child are endless.”

With the help of pediatric physical therapist Annette Willgens and a special horse named Rupert at the EquiCenter, hippotherapy is one way that Joanne has found to support her hopes and dreams for her 3-year-old son, Max (pictured on the front cover) who has cerebral palsy.

From seeing doctors and specialists to enduring upwards of six therapies a week, Max leads an incredibly busy life. Strengthening and stretching are a top priority for him, and there are days when it's harder to do this than others. “Hippotherapy motivates Max to do the work while having fun in the process,” said Joanne.

Unlike therapeutic riding, which teaches riding skills, basic horsemanship, and horse care and handling skills, hippotherapy involves a licensed physical therapist and provides treatment for specific health and developmental needs with the help of a horse.

Rupert is an older, gentle horse that is tolerant of having children like Max assuming different positions and performing various activities on his back. As they respond to each other's movements—much like a rhythmic dance—Max improves his muscle tone, balance, posture, coordination, motor development, independence, and even confidence.

“One time when Max was having a tired sort of day, I positioned him sideways on the horse to work his abdominal muscles while we played catch,” explained Annette. “In no time, Max did the equivalent of 100 sit-ups.”

“Hippotherapy has brought about a change in Max like no other,” Joanne said. “The bond between him and ‘his’ horse is priceless; it's what motivates him and helps him gain self-confidence in his body and its abilities. He is able to work harder on



Annette Willgens working with Jennifer.

the very skills he needs to, without even realizing it because he's having fun at the same time.”

Max and Rupert's “dance” makes it possible for Max to accomplish many of his therapy goals. “At first Max could not move his leg around while mounting without maximum assistance. Now he can move his leg independently to sit on Rupert,” Annette said. “He also can assume a squatting position and hold this position to rise and stand on Rupert's back. This shows a sense of motivation, confidence, and ability to use the left side of his body with the right side.”

Hippotherapy can also bring about tremendous social, emotional, and verbal gains. “Max loves to tell everyone about ‘his’ horse and honestly talks about it every day,” his mom said. “His language has grown by leaps and bounds and now he no longer needs speech-therapy services.”

A THERAPEUTIC PARTNERSHIP

“The EquiCenter truly advocates for hippotherapy and for children and families, so it's been a pleasure working with them,” said Annette, who has over 16 years of experience with hippotherapy, including certification from the American Hippotherapy Association.

“It's important to us to provide opportunities for children like Max that will help them achieve their goals and have a positive affect on their lives,” said Stacy Friedlander, director of programming at the EquiCenter. “We're pleased to now offer hippotherapy at the EquiCenter; Annette's expertise is invaluable and addresses a need in the community that's in keeping with our mission.”

Everyone agrees that perhaps the best part of hippotherapy is that it's real, therapeutic work disguised as fun.

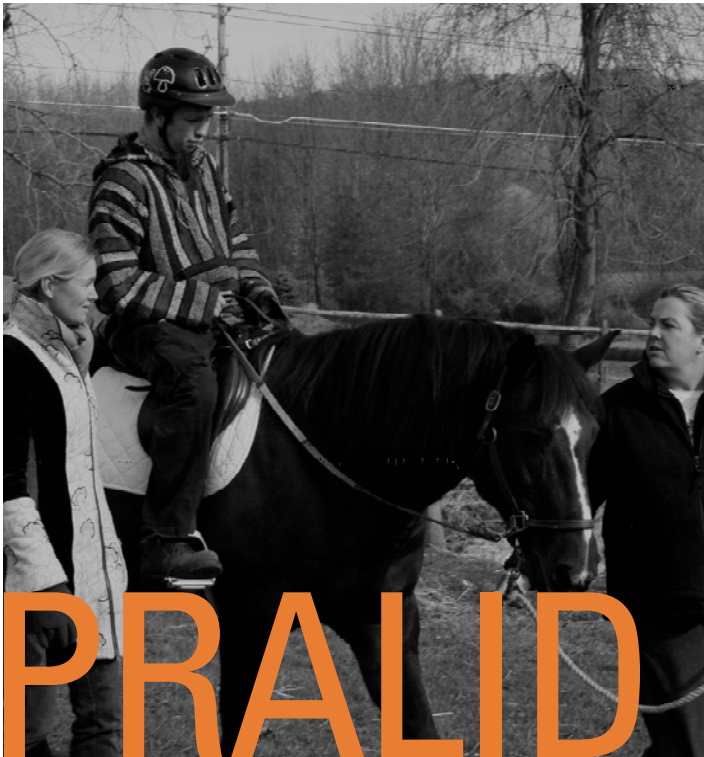
“The bottom line is about fun and empowerment and fulfilling a kid's dreams to be special,” Annette explained. “Society often conveys a message that everyone has to be the same, and I think that does a disservice to our youth. Our kids crave that feeling of ‘I'm cool. I can do this.’”

“Max got in the car today and said, ‘Mommy, I want to go ride Rupert right now,’” Joanne said. “He loves that animal. The truth is he's a very typical boy who happens to have cerebral palsy. Physical therapy will be a part of his life forever. But when he's on that horse, he doesn't realize how hard he's working. To a parent, that is magical.”

This story includes reporting by Amy Calabrese of the Democrat & Chronicle.

WHEN IS HIPPOTHERAPY AN OPTION?

Hippotherapy can be beneficial to individuals with diagnoses such as cerebral palsy, spina



Volunteers and "Charlie" assist Ryan during a lesson.

It's Friday morning. 10:00 a.m. A van pulls up and five adults make their way out into the sunlight just outside the EquiCenter barn. They're part of the Therapeutic Riding Program offered to members of PRALID (People Rebuilding and Living In Dignity) and they're ready to ride.

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PRALID offers in-home and vocational services to individuals who have experienced a traumatic brain injury and others with a range of developmental disabilities such as autism. Through a variety of programs and services, PRALID addresses the unique needs of their members striving to provide avenues to build on each individual's strengths and capabilities, and maximize their potential. A little over a year and half ago, the folks at PRALID heard about EquiCenter's Therapeutic Riding Program and contacted them to discuss the possibilities. And a partnership was formed.

The individuals who receive services from PRALID jumped at the chance to ride horses. A few of the participants had previous horse-riding experience while others simply shared a deep interest and respect for horses. For at least one rider this was like a homecoming. Years ago, before he was hit by a car and sustained a head injury that impaired his memory, speech, and motor coordination, Terry used to ride bareback on a friend's farm in New Hampshire. He loved riding bareback though he admits, "it's easier riding with a saddle." When asked how it was getting back on a horse, he replied, "I feel great on a horse. It has really improved my balance."

For many who experience a traumatic brain injury (TBI), balance and coordination are greatly affected. Improved balance is just one of the many benefits these participants

balance and coordination are greatly affected. Improved balance is just one of the many benefits these participants may gain from therapeutic riding. Riding a horse takes coordination, balance, and a bit of muscle. The PRALID riders aren't just

taking a leisurely ride in the barn when they get on Hope, Charlie, Jitterbug, and Hickory. On each ride, horse and rider go through a number of transitions, like walking or stopping. As the rider's body gets subtly in tune with the horse, these transitions activate core muscles in the rider's abdomen and lower body. This strengthens loose muscles and relaxes contracted muscles offering the riders an internal balance that manifests externally as well.

"When the program started, the horses did one or two steps with the riders," explains Stacy Friedlander, instructor of the PRALID Riding Program and director of EquiCenter programming. "Now they've moved to more complex courses with four different steps including weaving cones and walking to a pole. Their balance has definitely increased. We no longer have to constantly check to see if they're balanced and sitting straight."

More transitions also mean more to remember as they're riding the horse, which is good memory exercise for the participants. In most cases, a TBI leads to memory difficulties. For example, some who have experienced a TBI can clearly remember events of their childhood but not recall what they ate for breakfast. As the riding exercises become more complex, the rider's memory capacity gets the opportunity to stretch and improve.

Balance and memory aside, riding a horse is an equalizing experience. Tracie, who had never ridden a horse before her EquiCenter experience but "always liked horses," can attest to this. Tracie is self-proclaimed "short," she stands about five feet tall and is petite. She sometimes rides Hope, a beautiful, gentle Belgian draft horse...who is big. Hope's back easily approaches six feet. To mount Hope, Tracie climbs the wooden platform then, "it's a leap and I really have to spread my legs, but once I'm up there I'm taller," she says with a smile. You get the sense that she and Hope become one. "The horse becomes the equalizer when you have a disability," offers Donna Gividen, an EquiCenter volunteer who has been riding horses all her life and finds it "food for the soul." She goes on to say, "On a horse you can go as fast or slow as anyone else." Or in Tracie's case you grow taller with the help of the horse. Tracie sums up her experience best with one word "invigorating!" Ask Chauncey to sum up his riding experience in one word or phrase and he's at a loss for words (which if you know Chauncey is quite uncharacteristic). It's not that he lacks a word to describe his experience or the horses; it's just too hard to narrow it down to one. Watch Chauncey and Tim groom Rupert, however, and you'll realize that no words are needed. Their love for the horses shows with each brush stroke and speaks volumes. Tim reflects this love when he comments softly, "Horses are very intelligent animals. Riding them is pleasant and relaxing."

It's easy to see that EquiCenter's Therapeutic Riding Program is therapeutic on many levels. Yes it's helping the PRALID riders improve their balance, coordination, and muscle tone.

A HOME OF OUR OWN



At the crest of a hill on Route 251 in Mendon is a large white and brown barn surrounded by horse pastures. EquiCenter became the proud owner of the former ABC Farm, a 22-acre facility in February, thanks to a \$25,000 grant from the Daisy Marquis Jones Foundation towards the down payment.

“I think it’s fantastic that ABC farm will continue to be the home of EquiCenter,” said Barbara Anderson, whose father, the late Anthony Conti, owned the farm. “My father loved horses, and he could see what this program was doing for the kids and it absolutely thrilled him. I’m sure that he orchestrated this sale from up above.”

EquiCenter came to be at ABC Farm two years ago when Charlie, the first horse acquired for the program, needed a place to stay until another barn was ready for him. When the arrangement fell through just days before two more horses

for the fledgling program were on the way, Barbara and her dad offered to house the program at their farm. When her father passed away last summer, three prospective buyers approached Barbara about the property, which includes a 12-stall barn, pastures, and an indoor riding arena.

“If the farm had been sold, the chance of us quickly finding an affordable place to operate our program was slim to none,” said Jonathan Friedlander, president and CEO of the EquiCenter. “By providing the down payment, the Daisy Marquis Jones Foundation helped to secure our future, and we’re truly grateful for their generosity.”

According to Roger L. Gardner, president and trustee of the Daisy Marquis Jones Foundation, a Saturday visit to the farm is what sold him on the value of EquiCenter, which offers

hippotherapy, therapeutic riding, and horsemanship programs for people with disabilities, and at-risk youth.

“To see a child with a disability get excited about riding a horse, you can watch the confidence just spring out of them,” Roger said. “This program brings self-esteem and joy to these kids and helps to relieve the stress on their families and keep them together.”

Another reason why it made sense for the Foundation to

support such a worthy program was because Roger saw that those involved in the property acquisition were driven by their passion for the program instead of making a profit. He added that Barbara “was a very generous seller.” Now that EquiCenter has a place to call its own, Jonathan has been busy enlisting the help of others in the community to make improvements to the property.

One sunny spring morning in April, the cool wind carried the sounds of hammers, rotary saws and drills across the farm. Carpentry students from Monroe BOCES #1 built two new run-ins for the horses, three-sided covered shelters that provide them with protection from the elements. Joe Beyer, their teacher, oversaw the construction process.

“All an organization has to do is tell us what they need and buy the materials. Our students do the rest,” Joe said. “They built the main part of each run-in at our workshop in Fairport then delivered them here on trailers.”

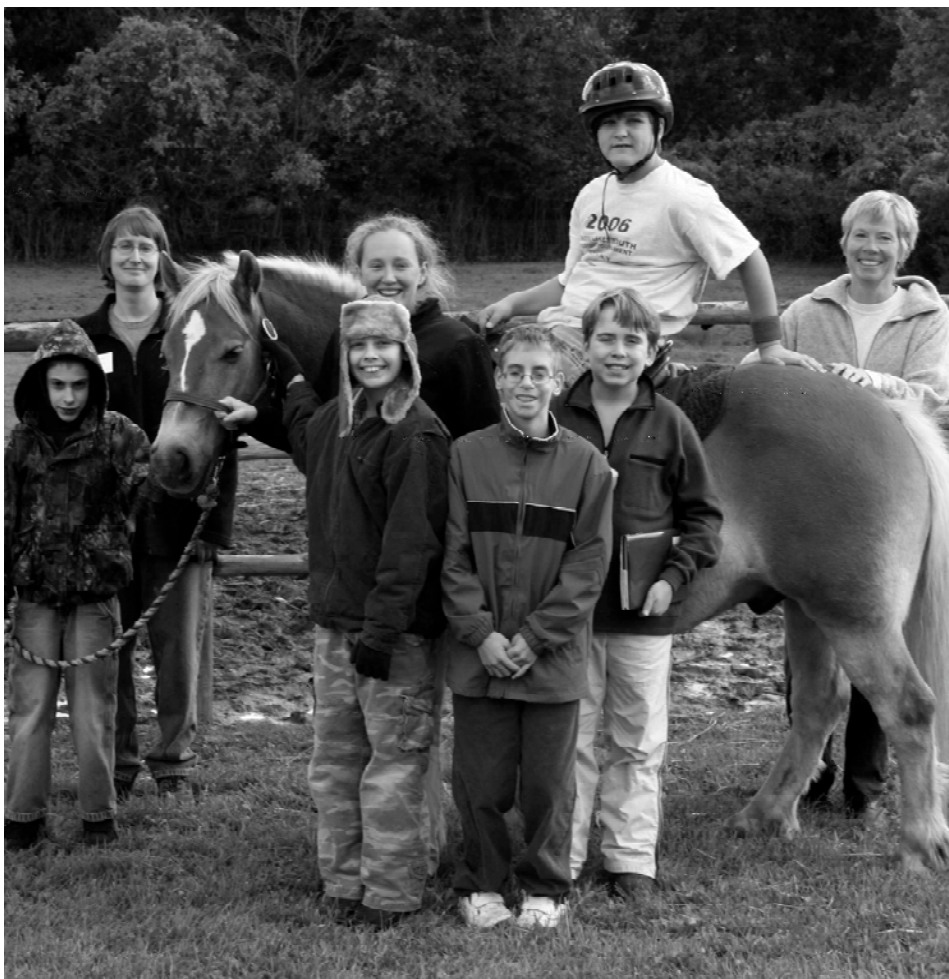
On this particular day, grade-school students from the Norman Howard School and horsemanship participants from Hillside Children’s Center join the BOCES crew to help get the job done. Building the front overhang, laying the roofing shingles and other finishing work are the tasks at hand.

“This project is truly a community effort,” Joe added, “and gives the kids a way to have a positive impact on others in the community.”

Andrew Bolton, an 18-year-old senior from Lima Christian School who attends BOCES so that he can pursue a career in the trades, wishes there were more projects to do like this. “Anytime you can help anyone get moving is great,” he said.

Barbara, a former horse trainer at Finger Lakes Race Track who has rehabilitated many racehorses during her career, is pleased with the new run-ins. “The ideal life for a horse is to run and graze outside, not stand in a stall,” she explains.

Although ABC Farm is no longer in the family, Barbara isn’t going anywhere right away. Her house backs up to the farm, and she anticipates that some of her time will still be spent helping Jonathan and Stacy care for the horses, most of which are older and on their second careers.



Norman Howard students enjoying a session with "Hickory."

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AGENCY HIGHLIGHT NORMAN HOWARD SCHOOL

This year some of the students at the Norman Howard School (NHS) have been learning a lot more than the typical curriculum. Thanks to the Horsemanship Program at EquiCenter, they are learning about personal responsibility, self-discipline, patience, and teamwork and having a good time in the process.

Rosemary Hodges, (Director of Education), first visited the EquiCenter to watch her niece, a participant in one of the riding programs and saw firsthand the enriching effect the program was having. She wondered about how such a program might help the students at NHS, a school dedicated to the academic growth of students with learning disabilities. During that first visit to EquiCenter, Hodges talked with Jonathan Friedlander, EquiCenter president and CEO, about the possibilities for NHS students. Later Jonathan visited NHS to tell others at the school about the EquiCenter programs. It was clear that the non-traditional hands-on learning opportunities offered by the EquiCenter could foster the kind of learning environment that NHS strives for: promoting students' development as respectful, responsible, resilient citizens. NHS decided to make EquiCenter's horsemanship program part of the fifth grade curriculum.

Once a week, fifth graders Grant, Thomas, Greg, David, and Ryan participated in a Therapeutic Riding and Horsemanship Program that uses a range of equine therapeutic activities to foster personal growth and individual achievement. During the riding portion of the class, they developed flexibility, balance, muscle coordina-

tion, and communication skills with both the horses and instructors. In the non-riding portion of the class, the students practiced horsemanship skills including feeding, grooming, handling the equipment, and overall care of the horses. The combination of these activities translated into learning not only with their heads but with their hands and hearts too.

From day one the boys became quickly invested in the program and the horses. Photos taken early in the school year show the five boys "grinning from ear to ear," said Hodges. Despite their zeal, there were challenges. According to Hodges, riding and caring for the horses meant that the boys had to practice and develop some of the personal qualities that challenge any pre-teen boy: patience, focus, and delayed gratification. As they formed bonds with the horses and staff, they soon discovered how much both depended on them each week. Hodges explains, "They understood the purposefulness of their endeavors, that they were making a contribution. It was empowering for them to feel needed by the horses."

The weekly trips to ride and care for the horses at EquiCenter also brought the boys together as a class, fostering a feeling of community among them. The relationships they were building spilled over into other areas of the school when they took their enthusiasm for the program back to NHS with them. Other students grew interested in what was happening out in the EquiCenter barn. NHS began using one-time trips to the EquiCenter as motivation for other students. One girl who struggles with a mood disorder shared that, "the horses just make me feel happy."

It's sentiments like these and the progress she's seen in the students that cause Rosemary Hodges to speak only praises for the EquiCenter program and its instructors. "We plan to continue these kids (the fifth graders) with the program next year. We'd like to expand the program with other students, but it all depends on funding."

There is no doubt that the NHS students who ventured to the EquiCenter each week learned a lot more than reading, writing and arithmetic. They



VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

Each role played by the EquiCenter's nearly 150 volunteers is vital, and it is extremely difficult to single out anyone from the "herd." However, in the case of Peg Jacobson, our ***Volunteer of the Year***, we are compelled to shine the light on her for just a moment. For those of you fortunate enough to know Peg, such recognition will be excruciating for her to accept.

Peg has been an integral part of the EquiCenter since its inception almost three years ago, even before the Center began providing services. As a founding member of the Board of Directors, Peg has shared the vision of the EquiCenter from the very beginning. Her enthusiasm, selfless commitment to helping individuals, knowledge of horses, creativity, and willingness to take the risks associated with a new organization have truly helped make the EquiCenter what it is today. In addition to serving on the Board of Directors, Peg has also been an essential part of various fundraising and special events committees, such as the hugely successful first annual EquiTrials benefit event held this past June. However, it is her time in blue jeans, a t-shirt and a baseball cap, immersed in both therapeutic riding and horsemanship lessons that Peg prefers most. She is one of those rare individuals who really "walks the walk."

While most lesson volunteers generously commit their valuable time to one shift per week, Peg can be found at the EquiCenter no less than three shifts in a given week. Furthermore, she is a regular substitute for other volunteers in need of someone to cover a lesson for them. And each time Peg arrives ready for action she lights up the barn with her positive attitude, commitment to the participants and horses, and passion for life. Participants and volunteers alike respond to Peg in a very

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MARY THERESE LUISA NORMAN 1985-2006

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UNITED WAY DESIGNATION

The EquiCenter is pleased to announce that we will be eligible to receive designations through United Way's annual campaign. This will begin at the start of United Way's fall campaign. Please give to United Way and consider designating your gift to the EquiCenter, Donor Designation 2420. For more information please contact the EquiCenter at 585.733.1111. To learn more about United Way visit www.uwr.rochester.org.

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