

EQUICENTER POST

2012

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November 2012

We are the parents of a 21-year old young man with multiple disabilities. His name is Justin and he is our only child. Justin is challenged with tri-paresis cerebral palsy, developmental delay, seizure disorder, and low vision.

We first learned of the EquiCenter through a pamphlet we saw in the waiting room of the Easter Seals Clinic, while waiting to see a psychiatrist to help Justin and our family deal with his emotional and behavioral issues. We were very interested in getting Justin involved in the EquiCenter's Therapeutic Riding Program not only for the physical benefits of it, but also for the emotional, social and behavioral benefits of it as well. Since he is an only child, he doesn't have much peer interaction outside of school.

On the day of his first riding lesson, back in the fall of 2004, Justin was introduced to a horse named Charlie. He was afraid to actually get on the horse and ride that first day. The EquiCenter staff and volunteers were very supportive and patient with him. They didn't push him into getting on the horse, and they didn't send him away either. Instead, they allowed Justin to become comfortable with Charlie and the environment by having him groom the horse, try on the riding helmet and go up on the mounting ramp to allow him to be somewhat level to the horse. Justin seemed to really enjoy this and began to relax and settle into the idea of riding. He said that he would actually mount and ride Charlie at the second lesson.

Well let me just say, that ever since that first day at the EquiCenter eight years ago, Justin has never been the same!! We rode home that day listening to Justin go on and on with excitement about Charlie and wanting to ride him!! He wanted to know how many days he had to wait and counted down from that day on until his second lesson when he got on and rode Charlie just as he said he would.

Before starting the program, Justin was pretty much ambivalent towards animals, and although he has a dog, he never really paid much attention to him or took any interest in caring for him. But Justin bonded with that horse right from the start. It was love at first sight for Justin! He has since ridden two other horses that he has had an equal love for, Hope and now Rayne. He often verbally expresses his love for Rayne and tells everyone at school and in our family. He shows his love by bringing apple and carrot treats for Rayne. He is very tender when he grooms Rayne after each lesson. This is something that we have never seen prior to coming to the EquiCenter in his interaction with animals.

He is very proud of the horse and of himself for his bravery and accomplishment in riding! He invites family and friends to come and watch him each week and he even got some of his teachers to come! Justin frequently writes about Rayne for his writing assignments at school and will draw pictures of Rayne for various art projects. Everyone in his life knows about Rayne!

He expresses that he misses Rayne in between lessons and sessions and wonders if Rayne misses him too. For Justin to express his feelings like this is a breakthrough for him. And when he learned he would have to miss six weeks of riding to play Adapted Baseball (which he loves) Justin wanted to give up baseball! When we heard this, we knew that this program and that horse truly have a permanent, special place in Justin's world!



We know that Justin has benefited from this program physically. His Physical Therapist at CP Rochester reported measured marked improvement in his range of motion, his balance, and in his weight-bearing endurance.

We are very grateful to the EquiCenter staff and volunteers and also to Charlie, Hope and Rayne for all that they have done to improve the quality of our son's life. He is truly benefiting from it physically and most importantly mentally and emotionally. Please take a moment to help children and adults like Justin by sending your gift of support to the EquiCenter because they change lives! It's great to have Rayne in the forecast!

Gratefully,

Ralph and Julie Presciutti

Ralph and Julie Presciutti



“When a Door Closes, a Window Opens”

Life changed in an instant for My Lien Nguyen on November 14, 1994 when she catapulted over the handlebars of her mountain bike and permanently damaged her spinal cord. She was 24 years old.

Diagnosed with incomplete quadriplegia, My Lien lives with some impairment in her hands and has limited use of her legs. She needs canes and a wheelchair to get around except when she's swimming or skiing. Or riding a horse. “They say when a door closes, a window opens,” My Lien says with her characteristic smile. “I’ve hopped through every window I could.”

My Lien is certainly not one to give up in the face of adversity. A refugee from Vietnam, she and her family arrived in the US in 1975, settled in a refugee camp in Arkansas, and were then relocated to Rochester where My Lien grew up. She went on to college and graduate school, earning a PhD in botany, and teaching college courses at the University of Hawaii, Wellesley and Vassar colleges. She is now completing another doctorate in pharmacy with the goal of becoming a community pharmacist.



“I couldn’t let my disability prevent me from living fully,” she says. And she credits riding at the EquiCenter as key to both achieving her goals and enriching her life. “I love the physical and mental challenges of riding, as well as the freedom to move about and explore trails and woods that I could not otherwise see,” she says. “It’s a great way to flex a different part of my brain after a day wrapped around science and pharmacy. And it’s just plain fun!”

My Lien had ridden before coming to EquiCenter in 2010 but says that the holistic approach including stretching and other exercises in the lessons has been especially helpful. “I have a lot of spasticity and the stretching really makes a difference. There is so much that happens here that I haven’t experienced before.”

While she enjoys other sports, My Lien says riding provides a unique combination of mind/body stimulation. “The movement of the horse goes up through my hips and spine and relieves a lot of the chronic pain,” she says. “And the philosophy of Centered Riding requires a mental agility that helps facilitate the use of muscles I don’t use in any other capacity. It’s as much mental as physical.”

My Lien has ridden many of the EquiCenter horses, but her favorite is Mavrick, a 12-year-old Thoroughbred gelding who is an accomplished eventing horse (dressage, cross country and stadium jumping) and is particularly attuned to a rider’s cues. “He’s so sensitive he picks up on the limited amount I can give him with my hands and legs,” she says. “That’s really helpful to me.” My Lien also credits her instructor Debi Houliars “who really works me physically,” and the EquiCenter volunteer side walkers and horse handlers who assist with all of her lessons. “I’ve learned so much from everyone here,” she says. “It’s a complete package.”

My Lien’s partner, Art Watts, is also an important member of the EquiCenter volunteer team. A senior programmer in the University of Rochester’s Department of Biostatistics by day, he’s a talented handyman at the ranch as well. He has built cabinets, gates and hay feeders; fixes tractors, and also helps out with the mowing. “He loves to build and fix things,” My Lien says. “And we both would do anything for the EquiCenter!”

My Lien and Art have recently purchased a nearby farm and, with EquiCenter guidance, are acquiring horses of their own. (They have also graciously taken in Miss Bailey, a retired EquiCenter horse, who is enjoying her retirement with them.) “My mother said ‘now you won’t need lessons anymore’ but I told her I will always need the EquiCenter to help me continue to grow and realize my full potential.”



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Second Annual Military Family Day

On October 28th, the EquiCenter proudly hosted its second annual Military Family Day with the support of the Max and Marian Farash Charitable Foundation. The day brought veterans and their families together for a free Halloween-themed day featuring pumpkin painting, games, therapeutic horseback demonstrations, music, pony rides, food and many other fun activities. EquiCenter staff and volunteers were so pleased to be able to give something back to those who have given so much for their country.



Fall Golf Classic

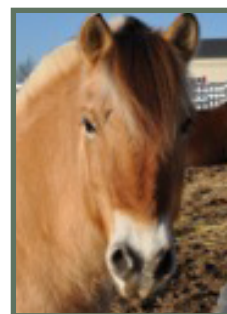
EquiCenter's Fourth Annual Fall Golf Classic presented by CloudDOCX took place at Irondequoit Country Club on September 24th. With the experienced leadership of tournament co-chairs, John T. Smith and Kaija Wadsworth, this year's Fall Golf Classic generated \$45,000 in funding for the EquiCenter's life-enhancing therapeutic programs. Please mark your calendar for the Fifth Annual Fall Golf Classic to take place on September 23, 2013.



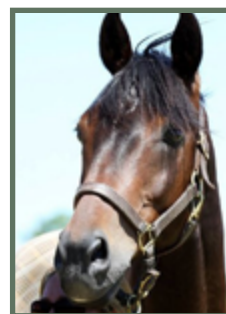
The first annual *Paddles for Saddles*® tournament held at Midtown Athletic Club was an exciting success with 70 mens and womens teams playing and over \$20,000 raised to benefit EquiCenter's therapeutic programs. The tournament kick-off was on a Friday evening with dinner, a party and practice play at Midtown. Saturday was filled with play at Midtown and five other paddle tennis facilities in the community with tournament finals held at Midtown. After finals, the evening at Midtown was highlighted by dinner, fundraising raffles and a party with a band.

Next year's *Paddles for Saddles*® plans are already in the works with a tournament date of March 2, 2013. For more information about playing in or sponsoring *Paddles for Saddles*®, please contact Lindsay Alberts at 585.624.7777 or lfoxluger@equicenterny.org.

New Equine Staff



Liam is a 10 year old Norwegian Fjord who stands 14 hands tall.



Mavrick is a 12 year old Thoroughbred gelding standing 16.1 hands tall.

We're looking for new horses!

We are looking for a few special horses to join our equine staff. Horses can be any breed, between the ages of 6 and 15 years old, must be physically sound and have a quiet and personable temperament to excel in therapeutic riding. If you or anyone you know has a horse for us, please contact Lindsay Alberts, EquiCenter Program Manager, at 585.624.7777 or lfoxluger@equicenterny.org.

Join Our Dedicated Team

EquiCenter is looking for new volunteer Horse Handlers and Side Walkers to help with lessons. Horse Handlers must be experienced with horses and are responsible for assisting students with grooming and tacking as well as leading the horse during the lesson with responsibility for the conduct and safety of the horse.

Side walkers do not need prior experience with horses. Their job is to support and assist the riders as needed during the lesson. Patience and a calm, friendly personality are always required to work at the EquiCenter. All volunteers receive mandatory training for their positions.

To explore volunteer opportunities at the EquiCenter contact Debi at 585.624.7777.



Pictured from left to right: Sara Drennen McLoughlin, Debi Houliars, Stacy Brown Friedlander, Lindsay Alberts and Marlowe Cline. EquiCenter instructors are certified by Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH), and the American Red Cross.

Five More Years!

EquiCenter Re-Accredited as a Premier International Center

A new certificate on the barn office wall states it simply: "EquiCenter, Inc. is hereby recognized as a Premier Accredited Center of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH)." But what it signifies is a lot more complex. The PATH re-accreditation process, which we successfully concluded during a June 15 site visit, involved documenting our compliance with stringent standards in every aspect of our operation from governance and finance, staff expertise and volunteer training to daily practices and emergency procedures assuring optimal student safety, equine care, and facility maintenance.

"We're proud that we met every standard set by PATH to ensure safe, high quality therapeutic equestrian programs," said Jonathan Friedlander, President and CEO. "It's a tribute to Stacy, our staff, volunteers and everyone involved here at the Levine Ranch."

This is the second time EquiCenter at the William and Mildred Levine Ranch has achieved PATH'S highest rating, the five-year Premier Center accreditation. PATH (formerly known as NARHA) sets industry standards for therapeutic equestrian programs worldwide. Lorrie Renker, one of the PATH accreditation team site visitors said it all: "It was rewarding to serve as an accreditation visitor and see EquiCenter in action. Keep up the great work!"

Looking Back

"Going through the incredibly thorough re-accreditation process gave us the opportunity to see just how much we've grown since our last accreditation in 2007," said Stacy Friedlander, Director of Programming. Within the beautiful ranch environment EquiCenter staff (both human and equine) and volunteers have enriched the lives of participants with varied disabilities in more than 750 therapeutic riding lessons and horsemanship sessions during the past two years alone.

The initiation of the *Horses for Heroes* program, serving wounded veterans and their families, is proving valuable for this most courageous group, and our relationships with area organizations including Al Sigl Community of Agencies, Hillside Children's Center, Golisano Children's Hospital, the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ABVI), Lifetime Assistance and the Norman Howard School give their clients access to the special therapy that only horses can bring. The EquiCenter is also exploring opportunities to work with other organizations including Horizons at Harley, Jewish Family Services, Cloverwood, Ontario ARC and the Veterans Outreach Center.

More than 200 volunteers of all ages -- assisting with lessons, encouraging students and families, gardening, helping to maintain our facilities, cleaning tack, grooming and exercising horses, raising funds, and doing countless other things -- make the EquiCenter's programs possible all year round. "We have so much to celebrate with our successful re-accreditation and the many exciting opportunities in front of us," the Friedlanders agreed.

Looking Ahead

With accreditation for the next five years secured, EquiCenter is engaged in strategic planning for future growth. The most pressing need is for a larger, heated indoor riding arena to allow growth in the number of individuals served and year round continuity in our therapeutic programming.

"Because of the nature of their disabilities, many of our students are unable to ride in cold weather. In fact, our level of participation drops a remarkable 70% during the winter," says Stacy. She notes that while this drop affects program productivity, the effect on students is the most troubling. "When students can't ride in the winter, they are not only very disappointed, but the therapeutic benefit is compromised, which is an even greater concern," she says. "Parents often tell me they wish their children could ride during the winter because it's so important and so helpful. Doctors and therapists also see a setback for those who must take the long winter off from riding."

The size of our current indoor riding arena also severely restricts the number of students who can ride, as well as limiting us to only one lesson at a time. As a result, there is a waiting list for most of our programs. A second, larger arena could be divided with retractable walls to enable private and group lessons and horsemanship programs to operate simultaneously. Plans for facility expansion will be shared in the coming months.

New programming is also being developed including the addition of horticultural therapy and canine assisted therapy. "These therapies will be the perfect complement for current and future participants," said Susan Taylor-Brown, Director of Research Development. "While providing equine assisted therapy is the core of what we do, we would love to be able to offer other therapies to create a complete therapeutic environment at the ranch."