



EquiCenter

Where healing comes naturally

VETERAN

&

FIRST RESPONDER

HANDBOOK

EquiCenter fosters growth, wellness, and educational opportunities for people of all ages and abilities through the power of equestrian, horticultural, and outdoor experiences.

Welcome to EquiCenter!

The purpose of this handbook is to share our policies and procedures.

Throughout the year, there are needs for updates and changes. We ask that you visit our website at www.equicenterny.org for any current or anticipated changes.

Included in this handbook, you will find:

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There are many opportunities for you to become involved in our program. As a not-for-profit organization, you can help support us by volunteering in various areas, including facilities, administration, special events, operational needs, and our lesson program.

1. EquiCenter Contact Information

Barn Phone: 585-624-7777 **Fax:** 585-684-7863 **General Email:** Info@equicenterny.org
Paperwork Email: participantpaperwork@equicenterny.org

Senior Director of Programming

Sara McLaughlin: SMcLaughlin@equicenterny.org 585-624-7777 x2

Senior Director of Operations

Lindsay Alberts: LAlberts@equicenterny.org 585-624-7777 x4

Volunteer Director

Debi Houliares: DHouliares@equicenterny.org 585-624-7777 x3

Executive Director

Katherine Hatch: KHatch@equicenterny.org 585-624-7777

Finance Assistant

Mark Anderson: MAnderson@equicenterny.org 585-624-7777

Director of Outdoor Learning & Therapeutic Horticulture

Katie Nuber: KNuber@equicenterny.org 585-404-1079

PATH Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructors

Lindsay Alberts, LVT (Mentor)	LAlberts@equicenterny.org
Amberlea Atwood	AAtwood@equicenterny.org
Audrey DiMatteo	ADimatteo@equicenterny.org
Susan Gilson	SGilson@equicenterny.org
Julia Hess	JHess@equicenterny.org
Debi Houliares (Mentor, ESMHL)	DHouliares@equicenterny.org
Katie Hurlburt (Advanced, Mentor)	KHurlburt@equicenterny.org
Joan Maher	JMaher@equicenterny.org
Sara McLaughlin (Mentor)	SMcLaughlin@equicenterny.org
Molly Ryan (Mentor)	MRyan@equicenterny.org
Sam Schaubroeck (Advanced, Mentor)	Schaubroeck@equicenterny.org
Heidi Vahue	HVahue@equicenterny.org
Evelyn Van Arsdale	EVansdale@equicenterny.org

PATH Equine Specialist in Mental Health and Learning

Colleen McDonough	CMcdonough@equicenterny.org
Phil Wytrwa	PWytrwa@equicenterny.org

PATH Equine Assisted Learning

Betsy Whitehouse	BWhitehouse@equicenterny.org
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2. General Safety Rules

- **EquiCenter is a non-smoking facility.** Smoking is only permitted **in your vehicle** in the main parking lot. Please dispose of all waste properly.
- Park in designated areas.
- Firearms **are prohibited** on the property at the EquiCenter.
- Alcohol and drug use are prohibited. EquiCenter reserves the right to reschedule your lesson if we feel there are safety concerns due to impairment.
- EquiCenter's hours of operation are from 8 am to 8 pm. Please call ahead to schedule any visits outside of your lesson or volunteer time.
- Do not visit the horses without permission and supervision. Do not hand-feed the horses.
- Pets are not permitted, except for approved service or therapy dogs with prior notification.
- Approved dogs must:
 - Remain on leash
 - Stay in designated areas
 - Dogs are not allowed in the South Barn or riding arenas
 - Stay away from horses
 - Be kept separate from other animals
- Participation in some programs may be limited when accompanied by a service or therapy dog.
- Do not enter other program spaces without permission.
- EquiCenter serves a variety of populations. Please be respectful and help to keep this a therapeutic environment for all.
- Your family members and friends are encouraged to visit. When lessons are in progress or horses are out, all visitors must remain in the designated spectator area.
- We encourage you to take photographs; however, it is always best to ask staff for permission before using a flash.
 - Make sure the volunteers and any other participants around are ok with their picture being taken.
- EquiCenter staff will maintain a professional relationship with participants and ask that all participants do the same.

3. Reasons for Dismissal

Possible reasons for dismissal include, but are not limited to:

- Failure to obey posted safety regulations
- Inappropriate or unsafe behavior
- Two (2) no call, no show for scheduled lessons
- Violating any of our posted safety rules
- Posing a safety risk to our students, volunteers, staff, or horses
- Any other reason or behavior identified by staff to be inappropriate or detrimental to or potentially detrimental to safety or lesson conduct.

4. Requested Paperwork

At the beginning, midway, and at the end of your session, EquiCenter may ask you to fill out a survey. In addition to a pre- and post-survey, we may have a quick questionnaire for you to fill out after each session, depending on the program you are in. These help us to collect data to provide to organizations that help make this program possible by their continued grants and donations.

5. Volunteer

Veteran lesson fees are fully supported through scholarships provided by EquiCenter. This is made possible through fundraising events, grants, and the generosity of individual and corporate donors. As a nonprofit, we gratefully welcome – though never require – volunteer involvement and participant or family engagement to help support our mission and programs.

<https://www.equicenterny.org/volunteer>

6. EquiCenter Adaptive Riding & Horsemanship

Contact: Sara McLaughlin, Senior Director of Programming 585-624-7777
SMCLaughlin@equicenterny.org

Riders participate in structured classes that provide therapeutic and educational benefits in accordance with the individual's goals, as well as an outlet for sport, recreation, and leisure. Lessons are tailored to provide optimum therapeutic experiences for each student.

6a. Registration Process

To ensure continuity of service and to maximize learning and therapeutic benefits of our program, we break our year into sessions; we have four (4) sessions a year. Your assigned lesson slot is yours exclusively for the duration of the session and cannot be filled if you are unable to attend.

- Due to PATH regulations, we must receive complete registration forms annually (including medical forms from your physician for mounted activities).
- Please include a copy of your DD 214 or VA card in your initial paperwork.
- Continuing registration forms are due 6 weeks before the start of each new session.

- Registrations received after the deadline may result in forfeiting your lesson spot.
- Continuing registration forms should contain all of your days and times of availability. If you do not have at least 3 scheduling options, we cannot guarantee you a lesson slot.

6b. Cancellation Policy

- Due to the demands of the schedule, make-up lessons are not possible.
- Please call if you cannot make your scheduled time as soon as possible (24 hours is ideal) so that instructors are not waiting for you.
- Two “no call, no shows” in a session may result in you being asked to forfeit your spot to someone on the waitlist.
- Lessons may switch to unmounted when temps are >90°F (feels like >95°F) or <15°F (feels like <0°F). If unmounted is not appropriate, a weather credit will be issued. If local districts (Pittsford-Mendon, HF-L, Victor) close for weather, lessons are cancelled. If travel from your location is unsafe, call 585-624-7777.

6c. Attire

- All students will wear approved ASTM safety helmets while mounted. We have a selection available for you to borrow, or you may purchase your own at any local Country Max store or online at www.doversaddlery.com, www.statelinetack.com, or www.freedomriders.com. Helmets must be purchased within 5 years due to PATH regulations.
- Wear appropriate closed-toe shoes. Boots with low heels and smooth soles are required for all students who use stirrups.
- Long pants are required.
- In cold weather, wear layers. Wear gloves that will enable you to grip the reins. Hats cannot be worn under the helmet, as they impact the fit. Some options include: helmet covers, 180s, neck tubes, or gaiters.
- In hot weather, wear “breathable” clothing to avoid overheating. Sunscreen and a cold drink may also be a good idea!

6d. Precautions and Contraindications to Adaptive Riding

Unfortunately, riding is not an appropriate activity for everyone, and we may occasionally decline services for individuals for whom riding is contraindicated. As a PATH Premier Center (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International), we must follow PATH guidelines. Here are a few precautions and contraindications that we may need to discuss with you before riding.

- Arthritis & Osteoporosis
- Behavior & Psychosocial Problems

- Diabetes
- Hemophilia
- Hip subluxation, dislocation, or degeneration
- Indwelling catheter
- Osteogenesis Imperfecta, Lordosis or Kyphosis
- Eating Disorders
- Hypertension
- Recent Surgery
- Recurrent pathological fractures
- Substance Abuse
- Spina Bifida
- Spinal Fusions / Spinal Instability / Spinal stabilization devices / Spinal Injuries
- Structural scoliosis greater than 30 degrees
- Student is over 200 pounds
- Tethered cord or Chiari II Malformation
- Uncontrolled seizures
- The staff is unable to safely manage the student in any situation, including an emergency dismount

6e. Weight Policy

Each horse has a rider weight limit based on size, age, conformation, and health. To keep our horses comfortable and healthy, we conduct a weigh-in during the session. This allows us to make appropriate horse pairings and balance workloads across the herd.

We understand this can be sensitive. The scale will be in our office, and only your instructor or a staff member will assist you. Please keep your helmet, boots, and jacket on so we can account for the total mounted weight.



Contact: Lindsay Alberts, Senior Director of Operations 585-624-7777

LAlberts@equicenterny.org

Trainers: Emma Minter, Amberlea Atwood, Phil Whytra

While veterans fight to build new lives after service, another American symbol is fighting a battle to find a place in a changing world. The American mustang has been a symbol of freedom throughout our nation's long history, representing resilience and strength to many Americans. As the open land continually shrinks, these horses are left with less room to live and thrive. The Bureau of Land Management has been essential in preserving the mustangs, and while 50,000 horses continue to roam free, 48,000 horses are in holding facilities awaiting a second chance. To find these horses' homes, they must be "gentled" and allowed a meaningful life.

EquiCenter has been selected by the Bureau of Land Management to help lead a national pilot program that will address the needs of both America's veterans and mustangs. Veterans work alongside professional mustang trainers to "gentle" the mustangs to help them find homes. Working together is giving veterans and mustangs a chance to save each other. Mustang Trainer Emma Minter has a background in natural horsemanship and training all types of horses, including mustangs.

7a. Registration Process

Same as the Adaptive Riding and Horsemanship Program

7b. Cancellation Policy

Same as the Adaptive Riding and Horsemanship Program

7c. Attire

These lessons primarily take place in the round pen - an unheated covered arena.

- Wear appropriate closed-toe shoes (hard sole with some traction).
- In cold weather, wear layers and make sure you have gloves.
- In hot weather, wear "breathable" clothing to avoid overheating.
- Sunscreen and a cold drink may also be a good idea!



8. EquiCenter Outdoor Learning

Contact: Katie Nuber, *Director of Therapeutic Horticulture* 585-404-1079

KNuber@equicenterny.org

EquiCenter Farm includes a 3-acre in-ground teaching farm, greenhouse, accessible raised beds, apiary (honeybee hives), and maple syrup operation. Our horticulture programs are a great way for participants of all abilities and experiences to learn about farming and the growing world around us. By engaging in hands-on planting, maintenance, and harvesting activities, participants in our horticulture programs experience emotional healing, improved cognitive skills, and improved balance, coordination, strength, and stamina. They can hone skills as they help grow thousands of pounds of vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers each

year, which are used in farm-to-table cooking classes, events, and donated to food security programs throughout the Rochester area.

Therapeutic Horticulture programs include weekly classes, seasonal workshops, and virtual courses. You can find all of our current and upcoming offerings at www.equicenterny.org/horticulture

9. 
EquiCenter
Cooking with Heroes

Contact: Katie Nuber, Director of Therapeutic Horticulture 585-624-7777
KNuber@equicenterny.org

"From farm to table by the hands of heroes."

This free program, for veterans, is taught by military veteran Ellen Adams, a chef and former contestant on the Food Network cooking show "Chopped!" Ellen provides participants the opportunity to learn to prepare a nutritionally complete, cost-efficient, and delicious meal using fresh produce, partially sourced from the EquiCenter Farm.

This fun and educational program is run by veterans for veterans!

We welcome groups and individuals in this program, which allows participants to engage with one another socially while learning food preparation, presentation, and the opportunity to share a meal.

To see our Cooking With Heroes calendar and to register to reserve your spot, go to: www.equicenterny.org/cooking-with-heroes

10. Veteran Service Agency Nature-Based Therapy Program

Monroe County Veteran Service Agency has partnered with EquiCenter since 2024 to help Veterans access Nature-Based Therapy Services. We offer Individual therapy with Dr. Collins and group programs in partnership with EquiCenter Staff.

Contact Dr Zach Collins for program registrations.

Current Group Programs

Mission Mustang® Group

Wednesday 1700-1800

Thursday 1300-1400

Friday 1300-1400

Therapeutic Horticulture Group

Wednesday 1600-1700

Thursday 1400-1500

Nature Photography Group

Friday 1400-1500

All programs are free for Veterans and open to all Veterans, regardless of county of Residence.

Contact Us:

Phone: (585) 694-8203

Email: ZacharyCollins@MonroeCounty.gov

Web: MonroeCounty.gov/vsa-nature-therapy

11. Resources for Veterans

Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255 <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>

The Veterans Crisis Line is a free, confidential resource that's available to anyone, even if you're not registered with VA or enrolled in VA health care. The caring, qualified responders at the Veterans Crisis Line are specially trained and experienced in helping Veterans of all ages and circumstances.

[va.gov](https://www.va.gov): This website is a one-stop site for accessing and managing your VA benefits and health care.

Monroe County Veterans Service Agency: <https://www2.monroecounty.gov/vsa-home>

125 Westfall Rd, Rochester, NY 14620 | Phone: 585 753-6040

To educate veterans and their families about the benefits they have earned; To represent and guide them in obtaining benefits and services both through the VA and the community; To make veterans an economic force in education, employment, and business development.

Disabled American Veterans-DAV: <http://monroepowers15dav.org/>

919 Westfall Rd Building B Suite 300, Rochester, NY 14618 | Phone: (585) 463-2782

We are dedicated to a single purpose: empowering veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity. We accomplish this by ensuring that veterans and their families can access the full range of benefits available to them. Primary services include claims assistance and resource connection.

Warrior Salute

441 Penbrooke Dr Ste 5, Penfield, NY 14526 | Phone: (585) 364-3171

Through various wellness and family support services, Warrior Salute Veteran Services assists veterans and their families during the journey to transition back into their community.

Rochester Vet Center:

2000 S. Winton Road, Bldg 5, Suite 201, Rochester, NY 14618 | Phone: 585-393-7608

Providing mental health and wellness services to combat veterans and their families.

Veterans Outreach Center: <https://veteransoutreachcenter.org/>

447 South Ave, Rochester, NY 14620 | Phone: (585) 546-1081

Providing a variety of services for veterans, including employment training and assistance, legal counseling, residential services, veteran and family support services, and support for veterans' treatment courts

Compeer Corps: PFC Dwyer Program <https://www.compeerrochester.org/compeercorps>

259 Monroe Avenue Rochester, New York 14607 | Phone: (585) 546-8280

Offering peer support that provides opportunities for Veterans to engage, network, and form friendships with other Veterans to help reestablish the feeling of camaraderie and build positive mental health as they transition from military service to civilian life.

Homeless Services: <https://www2.monroecounty.gov/vsa-homeless-rc>

Canandaigua VA Medical Center-

400 Fort Hill Ave, Canandaigua, NY 14424 | Phone: (585) 394-2000

<https://www.usajobs.gov/Help/working-in-government/unique-hiring-paths/veterans/>

NYS Department of Labor / Rochester Works! <http://www.rochesterworks.org>

267 Waring Road Rochester, NY 14609

Nicholas Brown Disabled Veterans Outreach Specialist

nicholas.brown@labor.ny.gov | 585-266-7760 Ext. 208

12. 2026 Session Schedule

Session 1

- 11 week session from January 5th – March 28th
- Mid-session break week from February 15th – February 22nd (No Lessons)

BREAK WEEK March 29th – April 5th (No Lessons)

Session 2

- 11 week session from April 6th – June 27th
- Mid-session break week May 24th – May 31st (No Lessons)
- ***EquiCenter Horse Show, May 30th***

BREAK WEEK June 29th – July 5th (No Lessons)

Session 3

- 9 week session from July 6th – September 5th

BREAK WEEK September 7th – September 12th (No Lessons)

Session 4

- 13 week session from September 14th – December 19th
- Mid-session break week November 23rd – November 28th (No Lessons)

BREAK WEEK December 21st – January 3rd (No Lessons)