



EQUICENTER
AT THE WILLIAM & MILDRED LEVINE RANCH

www.equicenterny.org



EQUICENTER

FALL/WINTER ISSUE

THERAPEUTIC RIDING

MEET CLAIRE

COOKING WITH HEROES

POST

FOUNDERS' COLUMN



We are celebrating our 12th year of providing therapeutic programs to our community. Many of you have been along for the ride from the EquiCenter's very beginning in 2004. You have witnessed the transition from our pilot program just down the road to the diverse programming that exists here on this magnificent 200-acre William and Mildred Levine Ranch. Thanks to the vision and generosity of Bill Levine, who called the chance to acquire our current facility "an opportunity of an eternity," we have been able to create a true therapeutic environment for a very broad range of individuals of all ages facing many diverse challenges.

The core of our therapeutic programming remains focused on Riding and Horsemanship; however, we have expanded to include Horticulture & Farming, Nutrition and Cooking Classes, Canine-Assisted Therapy and Adaptive Yoga. The number of individuals who take part in EquiCenter programming continues to increase at a steady pace, with 20% of our participants having served in the U.S. Armed Forces.

With the demand for our services continuing to grow and a perpetual waiting list, our future plans include a facility expansion with a large riding complex, as well as the addition of new staff both two and four-legged. The expanded facilities will focus on a much larger heated riding arena, an outdoor riding ring, therapy rooms, offices, classrooms and equipment and storage facilities. All of these improvements, including the addition of instructors and administrative staff, will allow us to better serve those in need in this community and beyond.

While the above-described expansion is imperative to help meet the demand for our therapeutic services, we must first address our financial sustainability in order to grow responsibly. As we focus on our Sustainability Initiative, we are working closely with many of you who share in our vision for a financially secure and vibrant center serving as a local, national and international model of therapeutic service. We thank you for your continued commitment and support, and look forward to having you along for the ride into the future!

Stacy & Jonathan Friedlander

WHAT WE'RE ALL ABOUT

The EquiCenter is a non-profit center that uses a wide range of therapeutic equestrian and related programs to foster the personal growth and individual achievement of people with disabilities, veterans and at-risk youth. Our current programs include Therapeutic Riding, Equine Assisted Learning (EAL), Therapeutic Horticulture, Canine-Assisted Therapy, Adaptive Yoga and Farm-to-Table Culinary Classes. Future additions to the horticulture and riding programs will include a green house to enable year round farming and vaulting.

Our therapeutic riding programs utilize the multi-dimensional movement of the horse to provide a unique and motivating therapeutic activity. Instructors, who are certified by the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Int'l), conduct these sessions. Riders in our therapeutic riding program participate in classes that teach horsemanship and riding skills while developing flexibility, motor skills, balance, muscle coordination, strength, and increased self-esteem and confidence.

Participants in our EAL programs learn experientially by working directly with horses. In this mostly non-riding program, participants develop personal responsibility, social and communication skills and an appreciation for teamwork, self-discipline and trust. Through these activities participants develop a sense of purpose as they help care for the horses who are in turn caring for individuals with special needs.

For more information about EquiCenter programming and ways to get involved,

Please contact us at info@equicenterny.org

Or call (585) 624-7772.



EQUICENTER
AT THE WILLIAM & MILDRED LEVINE RANCH

MEET CLAIRE: AN ASPIRING YOUNG RIDER



Claire and her friend Rayne

Claire McLaughlin, a young lady with Down syndrome and holder of some firm opinions, has plenty to say about the fun she has riding out here at the EquiCenter. Twelve-year-old Claire tells a visitor, “I’m going to ride ALL the horses.” She adds proudly, “I’ve already ridden half of them. I tell them “Walk on,” “Please trot,” and “Whoa!”

Even a few minutes spent with Claire (whose peppermint-striped dress and round glasses suggest Harry Potter’s friend, Hermione) leaves one in no doubt that she’ll soon reach her goal—and be ready for the next challenge.

Claire loves animals, especially horses and her neighbor Mrs. Gentry’s dogs, but she has none at home. Fortunately there are 26 equine friends waiting for her out here at the EquiCenter. Cold weather doesn’t stop Claire, who continues to ride throughout even the coldest months. No problem. “I wear extra heavy clothes and my purple helmet,” she says. The center was able to heat the small indoor arena last year, however, one of the center’s urgent needs is a large, well-heated arena where all riders can continue their therapeutic riding throughout the entire year.

“There’s such a special connection between the horse and the child who’s riding,” says Carey McLaughlin, Claire’s mother. It is a special sight, the horse gently moving at a measured pace, Claire laughing with her support team, comfortable in this world high above the ground.

“For Claire, there’s ‘riding day’ and then there’s the rest of the week,” says her mother. During the year-and-a-half her daughter

has been part of EquiCenter’s therapeutic riding program, she has seen a major improvement in Claire’s core strength and her physical agility. Her daughter agrees, announcing firmly, “I sit up straight and I keep my heels down!”

“I love seeing how proud she is when she’s riding,” Carey says. “She speaks with such confidence now. She knows she has something that’s just hers, something no one else in the family can do”—not father, mother, older sister Madeline, or younger brother Trevor. She is always eager to share stories of her riding adventures with her teachers and friends at Holy Childhood.

Claire’s life is full with school, dance class, and with Pittsford’s Little League Baseball. But there’s no moment quite as special as when, after a therapy session with her team and her favorite horse, she offers “QD” her dessert snack. That’s when horse and girl share a deep, friendly look, and an unspoken message is shared between two partners.

“I love all the people who help out so I can ride.”

-Claire McLaughlin

“Riding has benefitted Claire in so many ways - physically, emotionally, socially, but mostly in how she sees herself. It has been so gratifying to watch Claire’s love affair with her horses at EquiCenter, which has enriched her life in so many unexpected ways. Thank you in advance to all who are reading this for your consideration of support enabling Claire and others like her to realize this gift of the EquiCenter.” -Carey McLaughlin

EQUICENTER

HELPS CRISTY OVERCOME HER BRAIN INJURY

Astride “Harley,” Cristy Green is a model of horsemanship. She sits tall, her back strong and straight, her hands holding the reins with all the grace and aplomb of an Olympian. One would never guess the challenges she faces every day, years after her life was changed forever by a medical catastrophe.

Cristy was a vibrant 38-year-old when she suddenly collapsed, and was incapacitated by a serious brain injury. Weeks of hospital care were followed by a year living in a nursing home before she was able to return to her parents’ home. Now she is living in her own apartment in Brighton where she is thriving—and finding a new joy in life at the EquiCenter.

Rehabilitation happens slowly, very slowly. However, a few months ago, Cristy experienced a transformative riding lesson, one that has resulted in a cascade of benefits. On that day long-time EquiCenter instructor Sarah McLaughlin decided to introduce Cristy to a new form of riding—vaulting. Just outside the riding arena is a “vaulting barrel,” a padded device built to the proportions of a horse’s broad back. Astride, and supported by helpers on each side, a rider can learn to move in patterns of varying complexity—turning front-to-back, extending arm and leg in opposite directions while kneeling, and eventually standing upright on the barrel.

To everyone’s astonishment, after some tentative moments, Cristy took to the lessons with great enthusiasm, showing remarkable balancing skills—and trust in her teacher and volunteers. It seems her early years as a gymnast were coming back in a rush of muscle-memory. In addition to her pleasure and pride in these new accomplishments, Cristy, her team, and her parents are seeing other important benefits from this neural “rewiring,” including increased focusing skills, improvements in short-term memory, and executive functioning.

“Cristy is very aware of her disability and is sensitive to it when others are around—but never here at EquiCenter,” says her mother, Penny Townsend-Quill. “She’s more comfortable now in social situations, as well as being physically and mentally stronger. She’s come miles recently.”



Cristy in “full flag” position on Harley

Helping to break through Cristy’s shyness and reserve, Townsend-Quill believes, is spending time with riding instructor McLaughlin. “Sarah is young, enthusiastic, and sunny. She’s a positive person,” traits she shares with Cristy’s mother, whose years of dedication her daughter freely praises to a visitor. That combination of supportive parents, EquiCenter team, and lovable horses is very good medicine for Cristy—and for many of her friends at the EquiCenter.

“Cristy’s amazing progress would not be possible without the EquiCenter’s hard work, talents, creativity and dedication provided by the staff, volunteers and horses. The community support of the EquiCenter has had a profound impact on Cristy’s life and for so many other riders and their families. We are forever grateful for this generosity from such caring individuals.”

-Penny Townsend Quill

AFTER A LETHAL EXPLOSION IN BAGHDAD,

LUANN VAN PEURSEM FINDS PEACE AT THE EQUICENTER

It had been a relatively quiet afternoon for Master Sergeant Luann Van Peursem. Most of the action at Baghdad's Sather Airfield took place at night, when U.S. Air Force planes under cover of darkness, land, are downloaded and then uploaded with valuable cargo and troops by ground crews as fast as possible, and returned to the night skies.

"Turn 'em and burn 'em, we called it," says Van Peursem, a 33-year USAF veteran who was embedded with the Army and Multi-National Forces at the Baghdad airfield. "Airplanes are just too big a target to be left sitting on the ground," she explains. Her job was to help make sure that the cargo transfer was accomplished smoothly—and fast.

Van Peursem had been in risky situations before. But the explosion of rocket fire that afternoon at Sather caused serious injury. In the distance, she heard the moaning of two airmen. At the site, she was able to clear the airway of one of the wounded men and pull the second airman into a secure bunker where she was able to control severe hemorrhaging. Later the two soldiers were evacuated, first to Qatar, then Germany, and finally to Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, before returning home to upstate New York.

Luann retired from active duty in 2009, but not before being awarded the Air Force Medal with Valor. This decoration, not given during peacetime, was awarded for Msgt. Van Peursem's "selfless act of courage in putting herself in harm's way and directly contributing to saving the lives of two fellow airmen."

The events during that deployment and

particularly that day are memories that never go away. Luann explains Post Traumatic Stress very well stating, "is like a tattoo, it can stay with you the rest of your life." Like many veterans adjusting back to civilian life, there were bad days that followed.

Recent counseling has helped a lot, and Van Peursem says she will be forever grateful to the caregivers at the local office of Veterans Affairs and Veteran's Outreach Center who recommended that she try the therapeutic equestrian programs at the EquiCenter.

Now, two years after her referral, Luann is at the EquiCenter at least three days a week, joining other veterans who are finding solace, peace, and new friends in this supportive environment. She's becoming a very good rider and is devoted to her horse, "Spirit." Whether she's practicing yoga (taught by British Military veteran Victor William), being part of *Cooking with Heroes* (taught by U.S. Air Force veteran and renowned chef Ellen Adams), working on the three-acre farm, or just being near the horses, everything is good.

Luann Van Peursem, former warrior, now civilian, sums up her new life this way: "The days spent at the EquiCenter are my happy days - and the volunteers and staff are *MY* heroes." She continues, "If I can find a few hours where I can let my guard down, it's here. It restores my faith in humanity to see what these volunteers do. They've given me hope and a vision for the future."

"I am also very grateful for the generosity of people in this community, whose support for EquiCenter gives us a place to face our challenges and thrive when we return home."

-Msgt. Luann Van Peursem U.S. Air Force (Ret.)



Luann and her partner Spirit

FUNDRAISING EVENTS

We have had many successful fundraising events in 2016. Thank you to all our sponsors, participants, volunteers, EquiCenter families and staff who have made them possible!

PADDLES FOR SADDLES

MIDTOWN ATHLETIC CLUB*

At the beginning of March, Midtown Athletic Club hosted our 5th annual *Paddles for Saddles* paddle tournament. Sponsored by Calvary Automation, the paddle tournament brought together players from the Greater Rochester area to support the EquiCenter through a weekend full of paddle tennis, live music, food and prizes. Over \$40,000 was raised, which directly helps fund EquiCenter's life-enhancing therapeutic programs.

**Guy's Night Out* is another successful Midtown and EquiCenter annual event held in June.

Please join us for Paddles for Saddles at Midtown Athletic Club on March 3-4, 2017!



EQUITRAILS

A fundraising and awareness building event on June 5th inspired runners and walkers to tackle the 5k trail run through EquiCenter's 200-acres of fields, hills and woods. Despite the rain, *EquiTrails* welcomed many avid runners, who finished their run to the bluegrass tunes of "Elephino," a local band featuring our assistant farm manager and veteran, Tim Braley.



MANE EVENT



On September, 24, with the help of our presenting partners, Piehler Jaguar Land Rover and McCarthy Tents and Events, we enjoyed the fourth annual *Mane Event*. The beautiful evening began with craft cocktails under the oak tree as guests experienced riding demonstrations while the music of Significant Blues drifted over the field. This was followed by a delicious farm-to-table candlelight harvest dinner with fresh produce from the EquiCenter Farm. To top off the success of the evening, guests, sponsors, staff and volunteers helped us raise \$165,000 to support EquiCenter programming. Thank you to all of you who participated in this special evening!

HORSE SHOW

The EquiCenter Horse Show showcased EquiCenter students who beautifully demonstrated their riding and horsemanship skills. Spectators were able to appreciate the accomplishments our riders have achieved throughout their riding lessons. Improvements in balance, coordination, endurance, confidence, responsibility and independence were clearly evident throughout the day. The participants have all benefited from the internationally accredited therapeutic riding program designed by their EquiCenter instructors.



TEE OFF FORE A CAUSE

The EquiCenter and presenting sponsor Can-Am Consultants, Inc. teamed up this year for the 8th Annual EquiCenter Golf Classic on July 25 at Locust Hill Country Club. A stormy morning didn't darken this event, which raised a record \$51,000 to support EquiCenter's programming.



CANDLELIGHT 12 HOUR ULTRA MARATHON

Thank you to Gil Robs and the GRTC for donating proceeds from the Candlelight 12 Hour Run to the EquiCenter. Being the site of an ultra marathon was a first for the EquiCenter and the 12 hour run from 7pm-7am was quite a debut! Guided by headlamps through the dark hours of night, eighty-seven participants ran a 1.2 mile loop through the fields at the EquiCenter. A colorful sunrise greeted and warmed them as they finished their 60th lap!



U OF R DOCTORS ARE AMAZED BY THERAPEUTIC EQUESTRIAN PROGRAM'S BENEFITS

Dr. Carolyn Swertka recently visited the EquiCenter and left impressed. "I was amazed to see the calming effect the horses had on the children who were riding them," she says. "It was wonderful to see the freedom that riding gives to children in wheelchairs. This visit was a great learning opportunity."

Dr. Swertka is one of several medical residents at the University of Rochester whose training includes work with children at the EquiCenter. The opportunity for residents to see equine therapy in action is made possible through a special partnership between EquiCenter and Golisano Children's Hospital. Chief Resident Dr. Karol Hyjek saw firsthand how "the bond between a horse and person helps to overcome obstacles, whether they are physical, emotional, sensory, or cognitive."

"As pediatricians, we recognize the importance of community in supporting the health and development of the children we serve, particularly children with special needs," says Dr. Abigail Kroening, Director of the Developmental-Pediatrics Resident Rotation at the hospital. "We're grateful to the EquiCenter for giving our residents such a valuable experience in caring and advocating for children."

"Talking with a grandmother about the progress her grandson has achieved while working with horses was inspiring," says Dr. Katherine Allen, one of the visiting residents. "It demonstrated to me that great strides of patient therapy happen both inside and, more often, outside the clinic."



Ellie welcomes students to the EquiCenter from Horizons at the Harley School



Therapeutic equestrian participants from East High School



Rochester City School students in Allendale Columbia's Summer Leap Program visit the EquiCenter



HOW A SUNDAY HIKE CAN LEAD TO A JOYOUS NEW LIFE IN RETIREMENT...

When Laura Dustin set out with her dogs to hike the Lehigh Trail a few years ago, she didn't realize that she was heading toward a life-changing moment. Beside the trail she noticed a small sign she hadn't seen before, a notice that called attention to something named the "EquiCenter." Curious, she looked around for an entrance; eventually, unsatisfied, she continued on her way.

The very next Sunday while leafing through the Democrat & Chronicle, she was surprised to see an article announcing that the William and Mildred Levine Foundation had given an impressive gift of \$1.5 million to support and expand EquiCenter's therapeutic equestrian program being developed by Jonathan and Stacy Friedlander in Mendon, New York. A phone call to a friend connected Laura to an enthusiastic EquiCenter volunteer who encouraged her to experience the program for herself. Now Dustin is volunteering at the center every day except Sunday—and she's found a joyous new life after retirement, she says. She continues to "teach teachers"

in a special physics education program at SUNY Buffalo. "After teaching physics [at Honeoye Central School] for 27 years, there was a big void in my life," she recalls.

Just put me on a horse and I'll be happy," Laura told the instructor at her first EquiCenter volunteer training class. Now, as a side-walker, she has become an expert at making sure young riders



Michele, Rebecca and Laura

are comfortable and safe, and that they have fun during their lesson. "Often I sing as we walk," she says. "Horses have a natural cadence in the movement that I can match with a song. Sometimes I pretend that I'm the horse talking—and the child who's riding is suddenly talking back to the horse. We laugh so hard! What can be better than that?"

Dustin comes from a family steeped in volunteerism. "I learned early that everyone has something to offer," she says. For her, working with young people and therapy horses is the realm in which she has found great satisfaction. "Horses are special," she says. "I'm convinced they can see into your soul."



Kitty and Mitchell riding the trails at EquiCenter

"KITTY" ARRIVES FROM VIRGINIA HUNT COUNTRY TO JOIN OUR HERD

"Kitty", a 16-year-old Belgian Cross mare with handsome socks, has found a new home and career at the EquiCenter. She first met Jonathan and Stacy when the EquiCenter founders took a side trip to Virginia on their way to Maryland for their son's baseball tournament. At the time, "Kitty" was an accomplished fox-hunter living in Virginia horse country. Her owner, John Donovan, knew of the EquiCenter's need for very special horses as he had donated his first horse, Rebecca to the EquiCenter three years prior.

Donovan knew "Kitty" could play a vital role helping to improve the lives of those facing special challenges. Upon meeting her, Kitty proved to be everything that Mr. Donovan and his trainer claimed her to be. She is now a much loved and valued member of the EquiCenter Family where she is teamed up with many of the programs veterans and adult riders.

OUR NEWEST BOARD MEMBER: Heidi Stuart Vahue



Few residents of the Genesee Country have deeper roots in the equestrian world than EquiCenter's newest board member, Heidi Vahue of Bloomfield. For years, Heidi has been deeply involved with the International Stuart Horse Trials, the nationally-ranked equestrian event founded by her mother, Kyra Stuart. Vahue chaired last summer's final competition, which brought to an end a much-loved tradition.

"Horses have been part of my life forever," says Vahue, who began riding competitively at 13. She spent the summer after fourth grade at a seven-week intensive riding program in North Carolina, riding horses from the stables at Sweet Briar College. "We rode educated horses on their way to the Olympics," she says. Since then her love of horses has never waned.

Now freed from the demands of running an international equestrian event, Heidi has time to give to EquiCenter, which happens to hold a very special place in the Vahue family's life. Heidi and her husband Mark's 20-year-old son Mitchell, is a student here. Mitchell was born with Fragile X syndrome, a condition similar to autism. "A wonderful calming effect takes place when Mitchell is riding," Heidi says.

An outgoing fellow with the panache of an actor, Mitchell is continuing his education at Bloomfield High School and volunteers at Thompson Hospital. He's proud to have won a gold medal at the Special Olympics riding "Tuxedo," a now retired EquiCenter therapy horse who lives at Vahue Farms.

Heidi's work at the EquiCenter is not limited to the board of directors. She's in the barn and classroom as well. Every Thursday this summer, she worked with a group of students from the Norman Howard School, teaching a curriculum based program covering a

wide array of topics including the evolution of the modern horse, learning horse-management skills, teaching the importance of barn and stable skills, and how best to manage healthy pastures. The benefits go beyond the knowledge gained. "The EquiCenter horsemanship and horticulture program enabled our fifth and sixth

"A wonderful calming effect takes place when Mitchell is riding,"

graders to practice important skills they learned in the Skills for Life program: self-regulation, self-advocacy, responsibility, and relationship building. Each of these classroom extensions makes learning interesting, experiential, and relevant for our students because they can apply what they have been taught to the real world in a meaningful way," said Rosemary Hodges and Linda Lawrence, Co-Heads of The Norman Howard School.

As a board member, Heidi is working to bring the parents of students together to allow for much-needed networking. Parents of special needs children encounter many obstacles when negotiating the complex world that follows high school years. She hopes to add insight as a parent and former riding instructor to "help improve an already outstanding organization."

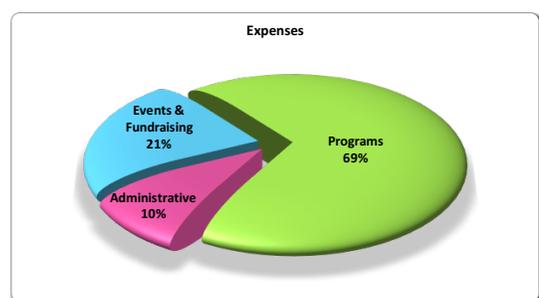
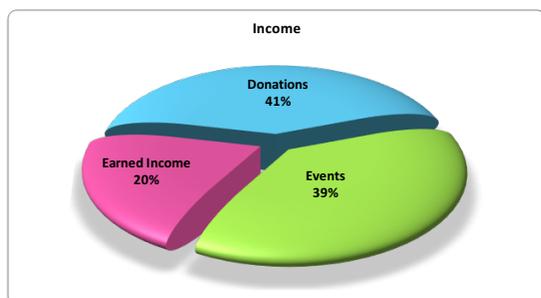
Welcome, Heidi! You're an extremely valuable addition to EquiCenter's leadership team.

2016 Financial Summary through November 30th

Total Operating Income \$780,869

Total Operating Expenses \$679,609

Total Operating Income, Less Expenses: \$101,260



COOKING WITH HEROES,

RETURNED VETERANS TEAM UP TO LEARN CULINARY SKILLS



Cooking with Heroes in the EquiCenter kitchen

On a recent Friday, sounds of laughter, chopping, stirring, and blending filled EquiCenter’s “dream kitchen.” Hard at work around the cutting boards were ten apron-clad veterans. As in their past military life, these men and women were following orders. But this morning the orders, in the form of “how-to” demonstrations and friendly tips, were coming from Ellen Adams, a 20-year Air Force veteran turned professional chef.

Adams, whose hearty laugh had put her students at ease, teamed up her novice cooks and was teaching them the mysteries of how to prepare a three-course meal, with lessons on the importance of knife safety, cleanliness, and clean-up. By noon, three casseroles of cheese/spinach manicotti were bubbling in the oven, a Caesar salad with “made-from-scratch” dressing and croutons filled a super-size bowl, and toffee-bars were waiting for the hungry veterans—who had spent the morning outside, grooming and riding horses at the stable. The laughter continued as the table was set, plates filled with delicious food, much of which was grown here on the EquiCenter Farm and the feast began. It was a perfect example of a happy family table.

This particular group of veterans has become part of a socializing, team-building supplement to the veterans’ equine therapy work. Chef Adams, who began as a volunteer, is supporting the classes through a generous gift received from a donor. [See following article.]

“CHOPPED!” CHEF

DIRECTS \$10,000 GIFT FROM BENEFACTOR TO CREATE COOKING WITH HEROES

It’s quite a story. Back in 2014, Chef Ellen Adams was picked to compete in a Veterans’ Day episode of the Food Network’s hot program “Chopped!” Before the televised beat-the-clock kitchen fray began the chefs, all veterans, shared their personal stories and how they would use the \$10,000 prize money.

Adams told the audience about her war-time experiences in Baghdad. If she won, she said, she would use the prize money to fund a hands-on culinary program for veterans. Unfortunately, she didn’t win—she was “chopped.” However, as fate would have it, watching the program that day was a California woman who was so impressed with Adams’ story and her style that she tracked her down in Rochester. She told the surprised chef, “I’d like to make that program happen and I’ll donate the \$10,000 you need.”

Chef Ellen teamed up with the EquiCenter and in January began regular classes in the kitchen. The veterans spend the morning working with the horses and then, at 11:30, move into the kitchen, clean up, and continue honing their culinary skills. The twice-monthly program, which links cooking classes with social support, will soon grow in frequency.

Where did the idea of a culinary program for veterans come from? It was suggested to Adams by the mother of a triple-amputee veteran who attended one of Adams’ cooking classes for military families at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas. “I hadn’t laughed in three years since my son came home, until today. You should do this for returning veterans,” the woman told Adams. The EquiCenter team has developed an exciting “farm-to-table” component to the cooking program. As summer progressed, the veterans participated in planting, maintaining and harvesting the crops grown on the EquiCenter’s three-acre farm and discovered new ways to cook the fresh produce in class.



Veterans prepare food with donor, Margaret Wahlrab (2nd right)

NEW PILOT FARM PROGRAM

LINKS EQUICENTER AND CANANDAIGUA VA MEDICAL CENTER

Can research prove the value of therapeutic horticulture for veterans?



A garden is a healing place with the added therapeutic benefit of working with a collaborative team on a three-acre farm.

In early August, the EquiCenter Farm became the heart of a science-based pilot project designed to explore aspects of that question. EquiCenter Farm manager Erin Bullock, assistant manager Tim Braley, and center consultant Dr. Susan Taylor-Brown designed the 10-week pilot project in conjunction with chiropractor Paul Dougherty, staff member and researcher at the VA Medical Center in Canandaigua. Dr. Dougherty, a specialist in treating chronic pain, previously has conducted three randomized trials testing methods of treating back pain issues.

Early in August, four veterans from the VA Medical Center were enrolled in the trial, which is designed to determine if classes in horticulture combined with teamwork on the farm can be effective in providing pain relief and improving general quality-of-life issues. Study participants completed an initial questionnaire providing a baseline for future comparison of their physical and mental health.

Every Wednesday the team came to the EquiCenter, where the day began with a class in how to grow garden produce using organic methods, followed by hands-on work on the farm. Fresh vegetables were harvested by the veterans and transformed into a healthy lunch, with cooking instruction from EquiCenter Farm and kitchen specialist Evan Bussey. After lunch, participants went back to the field to pick vegetables, herbs, and flowers to take home.

In mid-October, at the end of the 10-week trial project, the four veterans completed a follow-up questionnaire. Comparative analysis of the questionnaires was done by Dr. Dougherty, complemented by in-depth interviews with the veterans performed by Dr. Taylor-Brown. Dr. Dougherty will share results with EquiCenter and VA Medical Center staff and management.

“One of the things that’s being tested here at the EquiCenter is ‘proof of concept,’” says Dr. Dougherty. “No other veterans group is testing the effectiveness of therapeutic horticulture on veterans’ well-being. If we can show positive results, we’ll be at the forefront of what could be a new national movement.”

TIM BRALEY,

ASSISTANT FARM MANAGER, RECEIVES MISSION CONTINUES FELLOWSHIP

For those new to the term, Mission Continues it is a national non-profit organization that empowers veterans adjusting to life at home to find “purpose missions” in community service. The goals, simply stated: Work hard. Think. Learn and grow. Respect. Have fun.

Tim Braley, our assistant farm manager, recently was awarded a 26-week Mission Continues Fellowship which provides access to tools and modest financial support to further a veteran’s self-identified goals. He is the third veteran to receive this fellowship at the EquiCenter. Braley entered the military at 17 and spent 2005-06 in Iraq as part of a tank crew. On his return, he was attracted to a career in community service while a student at Nazareth College. Nazareth’s Peace and Justice program introduced him to social issues and the important role farms and farmers have in keeping the nation healthy. “The more I learned, the more I wanted to work on food issues,” he says.

As a returned veteran, Tim was eligible to apply for the Mission Continues Fellowship. He recently helped write the grant proposal for the EquiCenter’s pilot program for veteran farmers [see related article]. And each week, he faithfully works on-line with members of Mission Continues, his personal support team, as he builds a new life far from the war zone he remembers only too well.



Tim Braley (left)

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Bright Start Pediatric Services

Elizabeth R. McArnarney, MD
Golisano Children's Hospital

Thomas McInerney, MD
Golisano Children's Hospital

Olle Jane Sahler, MD
Golisano Children's Hospital

Stephen B. Sulkes, MD
Golisano Children's Hospital

Susan Taylor-Brown, PhD, MPH
Operation Consultant, EquiCenter
Clinical Professor, Pediatrics,
Golisano Children's Hospital



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