

Where 'horsing around' is therapy Right Next Door: People and Animal Learning Services

By Jan Ley

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In 1952, Liz Hartel of Denmark, riding her horse Jubilee, won the Silver Medal for dressage at the Helsinki Olympic Games. Quiet an accomplishment, considering Hartel used a wheelchair, both legs paralyzed from polio.

By 1957, medical and equine professionals in England (and later in America) began utilizing hippotherapy (from the Greek word hippos meaning horse) for people with disabilities.

Locally, Fern Bonchek is the director and instructor of People and Animal Learning Services (P.A.L.S.) and utilizes therapeutic riding for children and adults with physical and mental handicaps such as attention deficit disorder, amputations, Autism, brain injuries, cerebral palsy, Downs syndrome, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, post polio, spinal cord injuries and stroke.

Jennifer Lorinsky is another certified therapeutic riding instructor who works out of Rocky River Equestrian Center, 2025 N. Russell Road. She uses four horses and two ponies to work with a variety of children and adults from the Bloomington and Spencer area's group homes and private families.

P.A.L.S. works out of Stone Creek Ranch, owned by Wayne and Cindy Allbright. Bonchek teaches at Stone Creek's indoor arena and is training eight of Allbright's horses for therapeutic riding. She has two of her own horses that she uses.

"It usually takes three months, working one or two times a week, to train a horse," Bonchek says. She explained that horses need to feel comfortable around wheelchairs, ramps, learning tools like balls and cones, and being led by side walkers.

She starts a round of lessons today, working with people from Stone Belt and the Southern Indiana Center for Handicapped Living has donated scholarships to several disabled persons from Bedford. Her clientele is sometimes referred by local schools, physical therapists and word of mouth. Future sessions are planned this fall.

All participants are evaluated by a medical professional or certified therapeutic riding instructor to decide upon the most appropriate therapy plan. Bonchek has a degree in psychology with special attention to autism, but she wasn't sure what she could do with her degree.

"I've always ridden horses and I have a love of people," she says.

Finally, her dad, Steve Bonchek told her, "I can't believe you haven't figured it out. Why not therapeutic horseback riding?"

Bonchek and Lorinsky received their entry level certification from North American Riding for the Handicapped Association.

Bonchek recently completed her advanced level certification, meaning she is knowledgeable in horsemanship and



Krista Heard, front, and Fern Bonchek walk a horse to an area to be washed at Stone Creek Stables. Staff photo by Jeremy Hogan

disabilities and their relationships to therapeutic riding. Bonchek can conduct safe, challenging and effective lessons. She is also a member of the Indiana Horse Council Therapeutic Riding/Driving Division.

"I emphasize working to the best of one's ability. Parents and riders can set reasonable goals," said Bonchek. "Therapeutic riding involves using memory and concentration. It builds self-esteem and has tremendous physical benefits."

A group from Stone Belt recently gathered to complete a ramp that will be used for sessions. Stone Belt employees Emma Van Buskirk, Katie Bishop and Nedra Stancik, along with Bonchek and her father, worked with several disabled young adults to erect the ramp. Rogers Building Supply, All-Phase and Rod Young helped by donating the materials needed. The ramp will enable riders to mount from above the horse.

P.A.L.S. is looking for volunteers to participate in upcoming programs. Other ways to get involved in helping the handicapped to ride are by financial, horse, tack or other donations.

For more information about the programs, call (812) 876-1907 or write to Bonchek at R 3 Box 390, Solsberry, IN 47459 or call Rocky River Equestrian Center at 333-0261. To reach Jennifer Lorinsky, call 339-2849 or write to her care of Rocky River Equestrian Center, 2025 N. Russell Road.

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