

HeraldTimesOnline.com

Boys and Girls Clubs get grant to give kids riding lessons

By Dann Denny
December 8, 2010

331-4350 | ddenny@heraldt.com

Brittany Myers, 14, said there were times when the horse she rode — a chestnut-colored male named Walter — had an attitude.

“He was usually grouchy when I was tacking him up, but most of the time he was in a really good mood,” she said. “My favorite moment was being able to ride by myself in the arena without any guides or sidewalkers.”

Myers is one of 12 members of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Bloomington, who over the past year, have enjoyed weekly, 90-minute riding sessions for 10 weeks through the People and Animal Learning Services program — thanks to a Jack Hopkins Grant awarded to PALS for that purpose.

For each of those group sessions, the grant paid \$300 to PALS, with the clubs paying \$50. PALS is a therapeutic horseback riding program for children and adults with physical, learning, cognitive or emotional disabilities; and for at-risk or disadvantaged youth.

So far, six of the participants in the PALS program have been from the main club and six have been from the Crestmont club. This March, the grant will provide another six members from the Crestmont club with 10 weeks of riding sessions at PALS.

“Our kids, particularly those from the Crestmont club, would not have had this opportunity without this grant and our partnership with PALS,” said Jeff Baldwin, executive director of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Bloomington. “With some of the kids, it’s made a profound difference in their self-confidence working with and trusting large animals.”

Crestmont club director Shawna Meyer-Niederman said many of the Crestmont club members come from homes with household incomes of less than \$5,000 a year — and that most had not even seen a horse, much less ridden one.

“They were so excited each time they rode, talking about the horses as if they were people,” she said. “They’d say, ‘You wouldn’t believe what Cookie did today,’ or they’d talk about Lola, or Cody or Brittles.”

She said the grant and PALS program have given the kids plenty of fun, as well as a sense of responsibility and ownership.

“We are so thankful for the opportunity this grant has provided for our kids,” said Meyer-Niederman. “It’s absolutely incredible to see the joy on the faces of these kids.”

UPS donation

The Boys and Girls Clubs of Bloomington recently got some more good news when they received their first-ever donation — \$1,500 — from the Bloomington United Parcel Service.

UPS officials said they raised the donation through a pair of fundraisers last summer — a golf outing and ice cream social.

“We are using it to support general programming,” said Baldwin. “We are so grateful for UPS for thinking of our clubs and the kids we’re serving.”

To learn more about the Boys and Girls Clubs of Bloomington or to make a donation to the group, visit www.bgcbloomington.org or call 332-5311.



Brad Craig and Cody Shank from the Crestmont Unit of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Bloomington get ready to do some riding at the PALS stable. Courtesy photo

Copyright: HeraldTimesOnline.com 2010