

## Two local riders do well in national competition

December 8, 2005

People and Animal Learning Services, Inc. (PALS) had two riders, Sierra Launer and Melinda Martin, compete in a national equestrian competition. PALS ([www.palstherapy.org](http://www.palstherapy.org)) is the only North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA) Premier Accredited therapeutic riding program in Bloomington and is an active member of the Indiana Horse Council. The national competition was the United Professional Horsemen's Association (UPHA) Exceptional Challenge Cup Championship and was held on Nov. 17 in Kansas City, Mo.

Sierra and Melinda both qualified for this competition by competing in the Indiana Youth Challenge Equestrian Championships held in Terre Haute on Sept. 11. Sierra and Melinda finished in first and second place respectively. They were second of 22 riders in the United States who were invited to compete in the UPHA national event this year.

Barb Bonchek and Fern Bonchek, NARHA certified therapeutic horseback riding instructors at PALS are the rider's coaches; PALS volunteers Kirie Powell, Van Young, and Tracy Young; Sierra and Melinda and family members and friends; and the two wonderful PALS horses, Dew and Patti, all traveled to the horse show in Kansas City. Sierra and Melinda rode in an equitation class where they were judged on their abilities to control their horse by riding at both the walk and trot. Melinda and Sierra showed on Nov. 17 at 9 a.m. and Sierra made it into the top 10 finals and therefore she competed again on Nov. 17 in the evening. Sierra has ridden for only one and a half years while Melinda has ridden for over 20 years.

This event will raise awareness of equine assisted activities in Indiana, help showcase the accomplishments of the two PALS riders who represented Indiana at the national level and generate more interest in competitive opportunities for people with disabilities in Indiana.

Many sponsors made it possible for Sierra to participate in this horse show, including the Indiana University School of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation (HPER); Community AIDS Action Group of Southern Indiana; Bloomington Hospital Youth Programs; Bloomington Bagel Company; and many individual sponsors. PALS would like to thank all of the individuals and sponsors who made this event possible.

*Item submitted by PALS staff.*



Sierra Launer, left, and Melinda Martin, competed in a national equestrian competition. courtesy photo

Sierra Launer, left, and Melinda Martin, competed in a national equestrian competition. courtesy photo



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