

# The PALs Post

## PALS FEATURED RIDERS—KAREN AND SETH

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*This month, we are featuring two outstanding PALS riders who use sign language as the primary means of communication in their lessons. Be sure to read the article on the use of sign language in therapeutic riding lessons on page 2.*



Karen was one of the first students when PALS began, and has been riding regularly at PALS ever since. Because her mother had German measles while pregnant with Karen, she was born Deaf/Blind and requires the use of sign language for communication.

Sugar is her favorite horse, and Karen absolutely loves to ride! It is a rich sensory experience for her, providing sensations of motion, the touch and feel of the horse's body, and the transition from inside to outside when she goes on trail rides. Throughout her lesson, her side walkers sign commands into one of her hands, while the other hand holds the reins. In addition to riding, Karen has been known to spend up to an hour lovingly and carefully grooming Sugar with an assortment of different brushes and grooming tools, for which she knows the signs.

### DID YOU KNOW?

PALS is a North America Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA) Premier Accredited Center



### HOW TO GET INVOLVED

- Refer people to PALS.
- Volunteer in lessons
- Volunteer in marketing/fundraising efforts
- Make a financial donation\*
- Donate a horse, tack, or equipment.\*
- Sponsor a horse and/or a rider.

\*All donations are tax-deductible.

The main goals that Karen's instructor, Chris Holmes, has for Karen are recreation, increased muscle tone, control of impulses, and trust. Imagine what trust she must have in her side walkers and the horse as they move around the arena and go outside! According to her assistants, Karen looks forward to riding everyday, and knows just what day it is and what clothes she needs to put on to be ready for her time at PALS!



Seth was born with a rare chromosomal abnormality which causes him to have hearing impairment in one ear, some mild mental retardation, some ambulatory difficulties and some autistic tendencies. He lives with his parents and two older brothers in Martinsville and makes the trip all the way to Bloomington to ride at PALS. He started this past fall session, and has already experienced many profound benefits from riding.

The instructor and side walkers use sign language with Seth along with speech, because although he can hear what they say, he is non-verbal. Since beginning at PALS, he signs "horses" after school to ask to go to PALS, and he signs "horse go" when he is at PALS.

He loves his time on horseback, and has developed a wonderful relationship with his side walker, Ron. Ron noted that, "Seth has a very strong desire to ride, and loves trotting in particular; he would do more of it if only those side walkers could keep on running!" Seth also rides Sugar, and knows a sign for her name. He is working on learning sign commands for riding: walk, trot, halt, and turn (right and left). The introduction of sign language into his lessons has made a big difference in helping him to understand and to cooperate.

Seth's instructor is also Chris, and she says her main goals for him are patience and communication with signs, to overcome the frustration of being non-verbal yet having specific desires and learning specific communication with the horse. Seth's mother "can't say enough good things about PALS", and plans on continuing with Seth's riding for a long time!

-Amy L., PALS Volunteer

## LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



**Fern Bonchek** is the Founder and Executive Director of People and Animal Learning Services, Inc. (PALS). Twenty-nine years old, Fern has a B.A. degree in Psychology with a specialization in Human & Animal Interactions from the Union Institute and is a NARHA Advanced Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor. Fern serves as the chair of the Higher Education Committee of NARHA and is an adjunct instructor at Indiana University in the School of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation (HPER).

Welcome to the winter edition of the PALS Post.

2003 was an amazing year of growth at PALS, and 2004 is going to be even better (for specifics about 2003 and 2004 please read the article on page 5). For the first time, PALS has a winter riding session—and it is cold at the barn! This winter session is a true testimony to the dedication of the PALS volunteers and riders. It started on January 19th and we have twelve riders signed up and thirty volunteers—true examples of dedication. I like to refer to these riders and volunteers as the “Winter Wonderland Crew.”

But while PALS is growing by leaps and bounds in rider numbers, volunteer base and NARHA Certified Instructors, the state of Indiana recently cut the funding that about 50% of our PALS riders use to pay for their lessons. This cut in funding is going to have a significant impact on the quality of life for individuals with disabilities in

our state. Although this cut will have a major impact on the PALS program and its riders, we remain committed to offering therapeutic riding services to these individuals. In order to meet this commitment in 2004, PALS must work harder to raise the funds necessary to provide the riders affected by these cuts with scholarships.

You are a part of the PALS family and I am hoping you will help PALS by making sure that none of these riders are left behind because of the state budget cuts. Please consider sponsoring a rider. A donation of only \$35 covers the cost of one therapeutic lesson, \$350 for one session and \$1,050 for an entire year of lessons. If you are interested, there is a donation form on the back page of this newsletter.

The following are quotes from PALS parents and riders, and they demonstrate the impact that the PALS program has on the lives of the disabled in Indiana:

*“The people that I have met [at PALS] have changed my life for the better.” - PALS rider*

*“PALS is a wonderful place to help others, learn from others and have a good time.”*

- PALS parent and volunteer

*“It’s not easy to make a child like mine smile, but when he is atop a horse at PALS, a true smile is upon his face and mine!” - PALS parent*

I want to extend a special thanks to all of our PALS donors, volunteers, staff, board members, horses, friends, riders and parents for making the year 2003 so successful—let’s keep going strong in 2004.

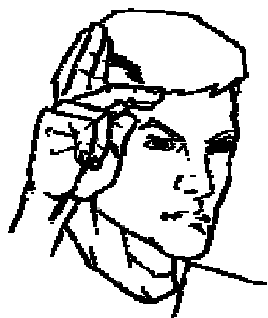
-Fern Bonchek, Director



## USING SIGN LANGUAGE

### Learn a new word!

The picture below demonstrates how to sign the word *horse*, an essential PALS word.



The volunteers and instructors at PALS rely on sign language in a variety of forms to communicate to the riders. ASL (American Sign Language), which uses finger spelling, facial expressions, conceptual signs, and gestures to communicate, is often used in the arena.

Some riders do not require signing as a main mode of communication, but benefit from signs during lessons. Signs enhance the auditory instruction as an additional cue to the rider. For example, if the instructor uses the sign for

“look” or “see” (the middle and forefinger pointed at your eyes and moved away from your face), and then points to the ground poles, while also providing the verbal cue, the rider has two modes of communication available to receive the instructions.

Some riders’ primary means of communication during a lesson is a microphone that relays sound through their hearing aids, allowing them to hear voices. For these riders, sign language reinforces instruction with visual cues and can replace the microphone if there are technical difficulties.

Other riders use signing as the primary mode of communication during lessons. If needed, an interpreter is used in the arena to translate instruction for these riders. Tactile sign language is also used to allow a rider to “feel” the signs.

Signing is learned easily, and the more you are around it, the quicker you will learn. Volunteers and riders at PALS frequently learn new signs at the barn and benefit by using them. If you ever see people signing, and wonder what they are saying, just ask, they’d be happy to share with you!

-Holly G., PALS Instructor

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***Thank you to all of our generous donors for making 2003 a great year!***

Visit us at: [www.palstherapy.org](http://www.palstherapy.org) email: [pals@indiana.edu](mailto:pals@indiana.edu) barn: 812.824.3000 office: 812.336.2798

## PALS FUN SHOW SUCCESS!

The third annual PALS Fun Show was a huge success! Once again, PALS riders thrilled the crowd with their excellent riding skills and demonstrations in dressage, equitation and obstacle course navigation. More than 40 riders participated in this year's event making it the largest Fun Show thus far. The 2003 show also included an information booth, a concession stand and an open house so that individuals could look at the new PALS facility at Ellington Stables.

Congratulations to all of the riders who participated in the 2003 Fun Show! And, a huge thanks to the volunteers, instructors, friends, families and donors who made this event and the PALS program a success.

For those of you who missed this year's Fun Show, take a look at the pictures below. See the PALS website, [www.palstherapy.org](http://www.palstherapy.org), for more pictures. And, mark your calendars— next year's show will be on October 9, 2004. You won't want to miss it!

-Amy R., PALS Volunteer



Dan and Navaar enter the ring for the show.



Melinda shows off her much deserved award.

### SESSION DATES AND UPCOMING EVENTS—MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

#### SESSION DATES:

- **New Volunteer Training: Saturday, March 6th at 1:00 p.m. / Contact 812.336.2798 or [pals@indiana.edu](mailto:pals@indiana.edu) to RSVP**
- **Spring Session Volunteering: Begins week of March 8th—12th / Contact Fern by phone or email to schedule by Feb. 23rd**
- Make-Up Lesons and New Student Assessments: March 8th - March 12th
- *Closed: March 15th - March 19th*
- **Therapeutic Riding/Able Bodied Lessons (10 weeks): March 22- May 28**
- *Closed May 31- June 4*
- Make-Up Lessons and New Student Assessments: June 7- June 11
- **Therapeutic Riding/Able Bodied Lessons (10 weeks): June 14 - August 20**
- Make-Up Lessons and New Student Assessments: August 23 - August 27
- *Closed: August 30- September 10*
- **Therapeutic Riding/Able Bodied Lessons (10 weeks): September 13 - November 19**
- *Closed: November 22 - November 26*
- Make-Up Lessons: November 29 - December 2

#### UPCOMING EVENTS:

- Equestrian Special Olympics: September 11, 2004 Saint Mary of the Woods College - Saint Mary of the Woods, IN
- Fourth Annual PALS Fun Show: October 9, 2004 Ellington Stables - Bloomington, IN

## WHERE TO IN 2004?

"Where are you going? Where have you been?" 2003 was an eventful year for PALS. We located to a new facility, expanded the lesson schedule, launched a pilot program with De Paul, and supported five riders in the first-ever Equestrian Special Olympics in Indiana. Our third annual horseshow featured 40 riders and drew a crowd of 300, and our annual rummage sale raised over \$1,000. With the start of 2004, PALS looks back to 2003 with pride and ahead with an awareness of our unlimited potential for growth.

Not only is PALS a North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA) Premier Accredited Center (and the only accredited center in the Bloomington area), but also Fern Bonchek serves as chair of the NARHA Higher Education Committee in 2004. NARHA was founded in 1969 as a membership organization to promote equine-assisted activities for individuals with disabilities. The association provides education for people throughout North America and

has a membership of over 6,000.

Last fall, PALS offered for the first time a 3-credit class in therapeutic riding through the School of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation at Indiana University. Due to the success of the course, PALS is conducting the same course this semester with a full class. We are also pleased to announce the further expansion of the therapeutic riding lesson program.. Fern expects PALS to provide significantly more lessons in 2004 by adding an additional day.

Look for PALS at the 26<sup>th</sup> annual Hoosier Horse Fair & Expo April 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>. Nearly 30,000 attended last year's fair, which boasted a list of clinicians such as Clinton Anderson, Kim & Yvonne Barteau, and Michael Richardson. This year, Fern will help coordinate the Therapeutic Riding program, including a PALS demo on Saturday, April 3<sup>rd</sup> at 11:15 a.m. in the West Pavilion Arena.

In the fall, PALS will return to the

Special Olympics Equestrian Fun Day, a chance to compete in a variety of English and Western-style events, including relays, drill teams and jumping events. The "Special Olympic Equestrian Competition" will be held Saturday, September 11th starting at 9 a.m. at Saint Mary of the Woods College in Saint Mary of the Woods, Indiana. And, don't forget to mark your calendars for the Fourth Annual PALS Fun Show, tentatively scheduled for October 9<sup>th</sup>. PALS will also entertain the plausibility of adding hippotherapy to the program.

While seeking continual support from our generous volunteers and donors, PALS will expand existing fundraising efforts and begin to develop new relationships with local and national foundations. 2004 looks to be as promising as the last!

-Virginia V., PALS Volunteer

## HORSE PROFILE — HOLLY

There's no doubt about it: PALS horses are very special!

Sugar, Navaar, Goodbar, Sonny, Patti, Mickey and Sunny all came to the PALS program through a careful step-by-step process under the watchful eye of Executive Director Fern Bonchek. A new horse named Holly is going through that process now and is receiving rave reviews along the way.

After phone calls, numerous questions, and another visit, or "horse adventure," Fern had Holly's owner deliver her to Ellington Stables for a trial period. As with all of the PALS prospects, there is a 90-day screening period before the horse is officially accepted as a PALS therapy horse.

For Holly, as for the horses before her, the screening period began with a series of introductions. A new horse tends to turn up the energy and the volume in the PALS barn. Holly whinnies, the other

horses whinny. Holly paces about her stall, the other horses' antennae, their ears, are up and tuned in Holly's direction. On Holly's first several days at PALS, it was clear that she and the other mare, Patti, had "issues" with one another. Fern advised keeping the two mares at a safe distance and leaving Patti and Holly to work out their differences. By week's end, the mares were gal pals.

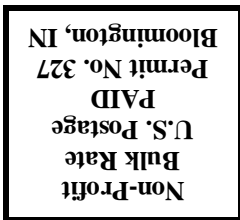
As the process continued, Fern and staff worked with Holly on issues of etiquette. Leading Holly into the arena, the staff gauges her response to voice commands and her tolerance of the hydraulic lift that boosts riders onto a horse's back. Next, an instructor rides Holly in an empty, quiet arena.

A few volunteers introduce Holly to some of the "tools" of a PALS lesson-- poles, rings, a basketball hoop, barrels and many other distractions.

As a therapy horse, Holly will be groomed, tacked and led by volunteers with varied levels of experience with horses. In lessons, she must accept sudden movements and loud noises with some riders squealing or screaming, while others are non-verbal. As Fern oversees the training process, she considers which riders might be best served by Holly.

As the fall session drew to a close in early December 2003, Holly's trial period was nearly complete. The final steps will resume with PALS' first winter session in mid-January. Holly will likely secure a job and a home with PALS, but only when she is deemed safe and sound will she be used in lessons.

-Julia B., PALS Volunteer



## HOW YOU CAN HELP SUPPORT PALS

### Financial Donations

In order for PALS to continue this good work, your financial support is needed. If you are interested in improving the lives of PALS participants through a financial donation, please fill out the form below and mail to PALS or call Fern Bonchek at (812) 336-2798 or email [pals@indiana.edu](mailto:pals@indiana.edu). Donations are tax deductible.

Yes, I want to support PALS with a tax-deductible donation of:

- \_\_\_\_\_ \$35—The cost of one therapeutic riding lesson  
\_\_\_\_\_ \$175—The cost of one month board for a therapy horse  
\_\_\_\_\_ \$350—The cost of 10 therapeutic riding lessons  
\_\_\_\_\_ \$1050—The cost of one year of therapeutic riding lessons  
\_\_\_\_\_ Other—Your gift will be used where it is needed most

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### In-kind Donations

PALS is still in need of new or gently used items as well as financial support. Please call Fern at 812-336-2798, or email [pals@indiana.edu](mailto:pals@indiana.edu) if you would like to make a donation to PALS.

#### New/gently used items needed:

- Rainbow reins
- Brushes, Currycombs, hoof picks, tail combs
- English bridles
- English saddles
- Girth
- Halters
- Lead ropes
- Plastic water and feed-buckets
- Saddle pads (soft and gel)

- Snaffle bits
- Therapeutic riding surcingle
- Arthrasooth
- Cordless drill
- Laptop computer(s)

#### Larger Items:

- Truck
- Horse trailer
- Sponsorship of horses
- Reliable horses