

# Horses help humans in need

By Cara Pallone

Appeal Tribune

May 12, 2010

Miss L.E. knows more about 5-year-old Josie Magill than most people.

She knows the little girl probably won't have much to say when they meet each week.

Miss L.E. has no expectations.

She knows that Magill's body twists and bends in sharp, uncontrollable movements, as if she's perpetually being stung.

Miss L.E. is never frightened.

She knows that Magill needs a good listener; someone who is patient and who can sense when something is wrong.

Miss L.E. is the reason Magill glows for 30 minutes every Tuesday.

## A new place to ride

Since 1988, Adaptive Riding Institute has called a small acreage above Scotts Mills home.

Sisters Susanne Rosen and Kerrill Knaus-Hardy founded the nonprofit organization, which offers opportunities in equine-assisted therapy.

This type of therapy uses horses to help people with special needs develop strength, focus, coordination and balance.

For several years, horses like Miss L.E. have been transported more than 30 miles twice a week to an arena in Salem.

There, they serve clients with a multitude of disabilities.



**Cara Pallone | Appeal Tribune**

Josie Magill, 5, sits atop Miss L.E. during a recent session at the Adaptive Riding Institute. The nonprofit organization offers equine-assisted therapy services to more than 40 individuals.

### Information

(503) 873-3890,  
info@adaptiveridinginstitute.org or  
www.adaptiveridinginstitute.org

### Adaptive Riding Institute equine-assisted programs

#### 1. Therapeutic riding

Uses the horse to provide physical and occupational therapists the opportunity to promote positive movement challenges.

#### 2. Personal development and learning

Riders learn about themselves by participating in activities with horses, then discussing feelings, behaviors and patterns.

#### 3. Recreational horseback riding

Horseback activities for people with disabilities as a hobby, seniors or others with dementia who are looking horseback adventures such as trail rides and camping trips.

#### 4. Equine-assisted recreational therapy

The Magills live in Silverton, but family members have traveled with Josie for the past two years to Salem so she can participate in the program.

"Josie has flourished with her riding once a week," said Joleen Magill, Josie's mother. "We've noticed a total difference in her whole attitude and physical being."

Rosen said the nonprofit serves people in more than five counties. There are currently about 45 weekly riders.

For families living in Silverton and Mt. Angel, one man's generosity has made it much easier to access the organization's services.

Adaptive Riding Institute still is operating at the Salem arena, but since November a Silverton business has opened its gates to children assisted by the organization.

### **Abiqua Country Estate**

An occasional nicker, birds chattering in the rafters, Rosen's gentle instruction: the Abiqua Country Estate Tuesday afternoon symphony.

With program director Carmen Hux on one side and volunteer Bud Lance on the other, Rosen led Miss L.E. in figure eights through a spacious arena last week.

By the end of the 30-minute session, the first obvious smile of the day struggled to form on Josie's face as she was placed, relaxed, in her grandmother's arms.

"It gives her freedom," said Colleen Boen, who takes Josie to Abiqua Country Estate every week and waits while her granddaughter rides. "It's just like going swimming. Josie's usually in her chair or a stander. Riding allows her movement."

The nonprofit riding institute is funded by private donations, volunteers and grants, such as a recent \$23,000 award from the Oregon Community Foundation.

Having a venue available at no cost also lessens the financial strain.

Bob VanEpps established Abiqua Country Estate about 12 years ago.

He retired from Denver, Colo., and traveled the Northwest searching for the perfect property.

He found it in the foothills of the Cascades, about 7 miles east of Silverton.

This program combines all three programs mentioned above.

[www.adaptiveridinginstitute.org](http://www.adaptiveridinginstitute.org)

### **How it started**

As children, sisters Kerrill Knaus-Hardy and Susanne Rosen played games that involved galloping, magical horses and great adventures.

Knaus-Hardy was born with spinal muscular atrophy, and although the sisters grew up around horses, it was Rosen who did the riding.

When they were teenagers, Knaus-Hardy coached Rosen before horse shows and helped polish saddles.

"I participated in that way," Knaus-Hardy said. "But of course I hoped that one day I would ride."

As she got older, she became involved in training canine companions and working with disability advocacy groups.

The sisters were living in California when they decided that if they could train dogs to push elevator buttons, they could train horses for people with special needs.

They sold their places and moved to Scotts Mills in 1988.

With a \$200 check donated by the Silverton Lions Club, they filed nonprofit papers and began building their organization.

Today, Knaus-Hardy lives in Bend, but still serves on Adaptive Riding Institute's board of directors.

Rosen remains in Scotts Mills and actively works with individuals served by the nonprofit.

Abiqua Country Estate offers boarding facilities and outdoor and indoor arenas.

Once a week the property belongs to Josie and numerous other local children.

Although the partnership is new, VanEpps' simple decision to help was made years ago.

"When I built the place, I decided there's a certain amount that needs to be given back," he said.

cpallone@salem.gannett.com

More than 20 years ago, the women designed a saddle for Knaus-Hardy so that they could ride together and they still design and manufacture custom equipment for Adaptive Riding Institute.

Both have different memories they cherish from that first ride.

For Knaus-Hardy, it was reminiscent of their childhood games.

"Here we were two adult women on very special horses, going on this great adventure," she said. "It was amazing to come full circle."

— Cara Pallone