



Loudoun Therapeutic Riding New Facility, Bright Future at Morven Park

Loudoun Therapeutic Riding has big plans for the new facility being built at Morven Park, and fund-raising is under way to secure its construction. It's an exciting new chapter for the center, which has been at the historic estate on the edge of Leesburg for 21 years. The signing of a lease for 90 years with Morven Park last fall ensures the future of Loudoun Therapeutic Riding. "This has been a dream for some time, and we are all excited about what this means for the future of Loudoun Therapeutic Riding," said Joanne Hart, LTR executive director. "Stabling

for 20 horses, indoor arena, admin space, and a classroom will all be under one roof, creating an opportunity to grow and enhance our existing programs and serve more people in the community who can benefit from our services. Being able to conduct classes on Saturdays will offer a 25% increase in participants right from the start."

The new facility's indoor arena will also reduce cancellations caused by adverse weather that currently disrupts the schedule.

Founded in 1974, Loudoun Therapeutic Riding is one of the oldest programs in the U.S. and one of the first centers to be accredited by the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (formerly NARHA). It's also the only PATH International Premier Accredited Center in Loudoun County. LTR's programs include Hippotherapy, Equine Services for Heroes, Therapeutic Riding, Equine Facilitated Learning, and Carriage Driving.

"At the moment, we have 110 participating weekly, ranging in age from two to 70-plus," said Hart. "Equine Facilitated Learning is an increasingly popular program. It's unmounted and more of an emotional than a physical demand on the horses. We have a staff member certified in Equine Gestalt Coaching, which involves primarily unmounted sessions, working with teens with emotional difficulties and veterans with Post Traumatic Stress."

Research is another goal that will be supported by the new facility. Ask any horseperson about the healing energy of horses and be prepared for some great stories. "In order for this industry to grow, there's a need for research so that there's scientific evidence of the benefits of the equine therapy," said Hart. "We're excited about our plans to work with Virginia Tech and their program that focuses on the animal-human bond."

You have only to witness the changes in a human of any age after interaction with horses. One great example of how horses and riding help people to overcome all sorts of challenges is Megan Giusti, a long-time participant in LTR. Giusti was six when she started on a leadline and, over the years, progressed to riding independently. She began competing in LTR's shows at Morven Park and in 2000 competed in her first VADA/Nova show (the northern Virginia chapter of the Virginia Dressage Association). For 12 years, she has worked for ECHO (Every Citizen Has Opportunities) at their Lansdowne Hospital site.

"My daughter is intellectually challenged – she was two and a half weeks overdue and in those days they didn't do sonograms every week, and she suffered brain damage – she's probably at a 7-year-old's age level, but when you meet her and talk to her, she has such an

amazing memory," said her mother, Kathleen Giusti. "She remembers what she reads and what you tell her. She can read a dressage test once and file it away and remember it five years later."

Megan Giusti's job involves sorting the mail and delivering it and she tackle her responsibilities with the same focus she applies to riding and competing at the Intro level in able-bodied dressage shows. She's friendly and helpful wherever she goes, whether at work or getting ready to compete or helping at LTR. She's a great ambassador in terms of showing the world what people with special challenges can accomplish when given opportunities.

"The VADA/Nova people are so inclusive of her – Megan goes out there and rides, she doesn't have anyone read the test to her, she has it memorized and she does what she needs to do," said Mrs. Giusti. "Their reaction is wow, she knows what she's doing! It's a great compliment, not only to Megan, but also for what she has achieved over the years with the different horses she has ridden with Loudoun Therapeutic Riding and the instructors she's had. Megan rides on Wednesday afternoon now – the love of her life is Jolie, a paint draft mare, which is why we have a paint draft cross like her, but Jolie is still #1 and they still have their little mojo. Megan's about to move up to Training level – it's great, we have our own little dressage team at LTR."

Megan Giusti is also paying it forward. She's just as interested in doing her volunteer work as she is with the riding. She helps with the buckets, grooming horses and ponies for the next riders, taking horses in and out.

"She's like a little barn rat when it comes to helping and it's nice to see it come full circle," her mother said. "She's made her way from being dependent on volunteers to showing new volunteers this is how to put on a halter or this is where this horse goes. You would hope that anybody able-bodied or not would give back to an organization like Loudoun Therapeutic Riding that gives so much to children and adults. In the non-profit world, volunteers are so hard to come by."

Loudoun Therapeutic Riding needs support from the

community. Their recent Preakness Party at the Middleburg Community Center entertained 150 friends, who contributed most generously to support the programs that this year will benefit more than 500 individuals and impact hundreds more through therapeutic equine activities at Morven Park. LTR needs people-support, too, in the way of volunteers and equestrian philanthropists for the new facility.

“We’re also very education-oriented and we’re partnering with other educational institutions to provide opportunities to young people to learn horse care and horsemanship,” said Hart. “A new program we piloted this year is called Reins for Independence. It’s a vocational opportunity, open to boys and girls – this first group is autistic young people from Loudoun County High School, and we got it going with the help of 100WomenStrong, grant makers for all sorts of charitable institutions.

“We also hold workshops for our peers and workshop certifications for instructor candidates for therapeutic riding,” continued Hart. “We hold workshops for Physical Therapists, Occupational Therapists and Speech Pathologists who are interested in practicing in equine therapy – they come from all over the country. We work with students of PT and OT from Shenandoah University – they come to do their capstone projects

with us. We also work with Northern Virginia Community College’s veterinary technology program. Their students come to learn about large animal work.” Loudoun Therapeutic Riding welcomes participants with cognitive, physical and psychological disabilities. They always need volunteers. A registered 501(c)(3) non-profit, Loudoun Therapeutic Riding also welcomes your donations.

For more information, please visit: www.ltrf.org



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