

OHSET spurs into season for Sisters

By Kathryn Godsiff
Correspondent

Sisters High School equestrian team, part of the Oregon High School Equestrian Team (OHSET) organization, emerged from winter ready to take on the challenge of their chosen sport. Practices, usually set to begin in mid-December, were sporadic and treacherous this year. Consequently, the first district meet held in late February was a time for the athletes and their horses to shake off the cobwebs, sweat a bit and try some new events.

Team advisor/coach, Annie Winter, said most of the other 13 schools that make up OHSET's Central District took a similar approach. The goal was to try hard and try new. Athletes and their horses are now ready to compete at the next meet on March 31-April 2 at the Rimrock Riders Event Center at Brasada Ranch in Powell Butte.

OHSET is a cooperative effort made up of student athletes, their horses, parents, coaches and local arena owners and coaches. Many of the competitors don't drive, and you can't exactly rent a bus to get the four-legged team members to the meets and practices. So parental support is crucial and creates a family and friendly atmosphere. Team members cheer for all, no matter what the outcome. The organization, which formerly flew under the school radar as a relatively unknown and unsupported activity, is now a fully integrated club sport. Team members earn letters and participate in schoolwide fundraising efforts.

Coaches this year are Audrey Goldsmith (dressage, trail), Turi McCabe (jumping, hunt seat, equitation and working pairs), Julie Vosberg and Kerry Newell (games and showmanship). Goldsmith and the Bartelotta family at GB Ranch allowed use of their indoor arenas during long days of winter.

That effort is one of the hallmarks of OHSET, a sport with a dizzying array of events to choose from, ranging from performance classes in English and Western, in-hand halter classes and fast-paced games. Each rider is limited to five events per meet, and often athletes choose to try something out of their usual routine. It isn't unusual to find a dressage rider in the team penning arena or a reiner running a barrel pattern.

The Central District covers all of Deschutes, Crook and Jefferson counties, and spreads east to Pendleton, north to The Dalles and south to Lakeview, with 13 schools participating at the last meet. Sisters, with 11 team members, is in the large-team category. The meets take three days to complete. Friday has English events (dressage, hunt seat equitation, saddle seat equitation, driving and jumping), Western horsemanship, pairs and drill team. Saturday sees the trail classes, reining, and cattle events (steer daubing and team penning.) Sunday is all games.

Admission to the meets is free and support is always appreciated.

"We have a wonderful group of athletes, all trying something different this year," said Winter. "They're definitely a team."

Sisters Bunkhouse marks first year

By Steve Kadel
Correspondent

When Kathleen and Michael Blesius moved to Sisters and bought the two-story, yellow building at 114 N. Oak St., they weren't sure what they would use it for.

Would it be a whiskey bar? Maybe they would open a candy store. There were lots of options, but in the end they gutted and remodeled the former teahouse space and opened Sisters Bunkhouse in January 2016.

The first year has been lots of work, but the former San Francisco Bay Area residents couldn't be happier about their choice. The change had a lot to do with lifestyle, and business success has come early.

"It has exceeded our expectations," Michael said. "We had a great summer."

"We just wanted to change our lives," Kathleen said of relocation. "We wanted things to calm down."

They found what they wanted in Sisters, and turned the building into an inviting bed-but-not-breakfast with "casual elegance." There's a comfortable common room on the ground floor where guests can talk or work on a jigsaw puzzle on a large table.

The four guest rooms feature custom-made furniture and hand-stained knotty alder woodwork. One of the rooms is ADA accessible, and there's WiFi throughout. There are maps of the U.S. and the world with pins noting where clients have come from.

One of the location's benefits, Kathleen noted, is that guests can easily walk to local shops and restaurants. When meals include a cocktail or two, no one has to drive, she said.

The couple intended to move to Bend, but couldn't find housing they liked. Looking around, they found



PHOTO BY STEVE KADEL

Kathleen and Michael Blesius stand on the balcony of their Sisters Bunkhouse with 12-year-old pug, Jack.

the yellow building that has become their first business venture.

"We've invested our life savings into this," Michael said, adding they are on projection to meet a three- to five-year business plan.

There's been little rest time for the couple during the Bunkhouse's first year. Now, though, they're looking for ways to give themselves small breaks. One step in that direction is the upcoming hiring of an employee to do cleaning or other chores on a flexible work schedule.

Despite the challenges of first-year business ownership, Michael said the process has been "remarkably smooth." They are planning to expand this spring or summer with a 30-foot by 40-foot patio.

"We want to do a fireplace and a water feature," Kathleen said. "This is such an outdoorsy place, and people love to be outdoors."

Although Sisters Bunkhouse doesn't accept pets, the owners are happy to provide contact information for other local lodges that have a pro-pet policy.

Room prices start at \$139 and are priced on a seasonal basis. More information is available at the company website, www.sistersbunkhouse.com or by calling 541-588-6122.

Kathleen, 47, and Michael, 51, both acknowledged support from the local community, which they appreciate. They want to return the favor.

"We're all about supporting the town," Michael said.

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