

Vaulting into Central Oregon's equestrian sports scene

By Kathryn Godsiff
Correspondent

Equestrians in Central Oregon have no excuse for boredom. Activities vary from trail riding to classic and cowboy dressage. Carriage driving, show jumping, eventing, high school equestrian team, 4-H, Pony Club, cattle work and just enjoying a pasture pet are all enjoyed by local horse enthusiasts.

One activity not on offer until now is the venerable discipline of vaulting. Long established in Europe and included as one of the 10 equestrian disciplines at the World Equestrian Games, vaulting is usually described

as gymnastics on horseback. Its origins stretch back at least two thousand years to Roman times and military training. More recent history includes vaulting as part of equestrian acts in circuses. Nowadays, participants may vault competitively or purely for recreation.

Ruthann Steere, who grew up in Michigan, recently arrived back in Sisters Country with her husband, Paul. She is prepared and qualified to teach and encourage children and adults who wish to engage in a safe, controlled, and lovely-to-watch equestrian activity. She is a certified vaulting instructor with a wealth of experience and a love of the discipline. Her business, Hope Mountain Vaulters, is based at a property near the Sisters Rodeo grounds, owned by Ann and Greg Christmas-Dale. Steere's aim is to establish a vaulting club in Central Oregon where participants may vault for fun or fame.

"Vaulting is a very diverse sport," said Steere. "You can start at age 2 and go to 102."

One of her favorite groups in a previous club was the Golden Gals, a group of senior women who put their age-related fears on hold and learned to execute the flowing

movements that are vaulting.

Just to be clear, the vaulting horse in this equestrian sport is not stationary while the participant hurtles toward it at speed, leaping over its back in a powerful and graceful movement. The horse, a live one with a broad back, calm demeanor and steady gaits, is traveling in a circle around the coach, attached to a line called a longe line and moving at either a walk, trot or canter. As the vaulter develops skills, more gymnastic movements are incorporated.

Some beginning lessons, however, do take place on a vaulting barrel and the use of the barrel in the winter enables Steere to continue to teach indoors while the weather is inclement.

Those who wish to compete find that the vaulting world is quite small but very friendly, supportive and family-oriented, Steere said.

She noted that in Germany, youngsters are required to take a couple of years of vaulting lessons before commencing a riding career. It instills a solid base of balance and unity with the horse.

Steere began her athletic career as a gymnast when she was a toddler. Discovering horses at an early age, after



PHOTO PROVIDED

Vaulting is a family-oriented slice of the equestrian world.

the death of her father, she saved up to buy her first horse at age 13, then began vaulting at 15. Her mother told her to choose between gymnastics or horses, and Steere was delighted to find a discipline that combined the two.

She attended Asbury College in Lexington, Kentucky, attaining a degree in equine management and outdoor recreation adventure leadership. Several vaulting clubs that she helped establish in Kentucky are still active.

A summer internship at

Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch near Bend brought her to Central Oregon in 2013. Two years later she returned to visit the ranch and met another summer intern who would become her husband. Paul is now on the staff at Crystal Peaks while Ruthann is getting the vaulting club going. The couple live on site at Crystal Peaks.

Classes are set to begin in a few weeks. More information can be found at www.hopemountainvaulters.com or by phoning Ruthann at 859-230-1710.



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Ruthann Steere hopes to create a vaulting club.

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