

The Trail Doesn't End Here



(Right) After being helped onto a horse, Pat Gorder is led from the barn (above) by Bob Abresch and Lee Rosen (checked shirt).



Horses take disabled riders places where their crutches and wheelchairs won't go

Photos by Andre Ranieri and Kim Nguyen

By Rene DeCair
Emerald Associate Editor

For a love of horseback riding, some people will go to extreme lengths. When Sue McCarty was 8 years old, she would take a kitchen chair and tie it to a saddle, which she then strapped on her pony. Next, she would get her younger sister situated on a box beside the pony, lift her onto the chair and secure her sister to the chair with a dish towel. "We lived for horses," she said. What could have been a cruel childhood trick was actually an act of kindness from McCarty who was helping her quadriplegic sister share in the fun of McCarty's horseback riding adventures. "But my mother never knew," she said, which was probably a good thing. "So we decided to try it a little safer years later." Now McCarty and her sister as the founders of HORSES — Horseback Outdoor Recreational or Scenic Experiences and Services — are giving other people with disabilities the opportunity to go out into the wilderness to see things that they otherwise might not have been able to see.

"I've been in a wheelchair for 27 years ... and it gives a whole different perspective," rider Pat Groder, 48, said. "I think the little kid in me decided this would be fun. The horse provides us with the ability to go places that our wheelchairs or crutches won't take us." With the help of volunteers and donations, including a ride-a-thon at Kalkowski Stables last Saturday that raised an estimated \$2,000, the group hopes to raise enough money for 30-week training sessions for disabled riders. The group is

'You as the rider have total control. The whole mental thing changes. They lose their disability once they get on.'



Varian Blanchard (left) leads his 8-year-old son Brandon around the stable, helping him maintain his balance. (Below) A volunteer leads Ali Thamet, 14, through an obstacle course inside the stable. Riders try to make it through the course without their horses' hooves touching the cones.



A grinning Ali Thamet is lifted to the saddle.

sponsored by the Bethel Lion's Club and Eugene Parks and Recreation Department. After the training sessions, held at different times during the year, the riders of all ages will go on two- to five-day excursions to various places, including Eastern Oregon and the Oregon Coast. The members say the trips are nice because it allows them a way to

get out of the city and into nature, which is often hard for a person with restricted mobility to do. "It's nice to find a non-mechanized, non-motorized way to go walk on the beach for awhile, to walk in the woods and see a deer," said Jean Mar-

chant, 33, who went on a group camp out last summer to Nehalem Bay. "It was wonderful to be outside and have unrestricted access to the beach," said Merchant, whose multiple sclerosis has required that she use a wheelchair for the last eight years. "It's really, really fun." Brendan Blanchard, who describes his age as "almost 9," uses a wheelchair and received nearly \$200 in pledges for the ride-a-thon. "I really do like doing it and stuff," he said, because he gets to experience the outdoors. McCarty said the money raised from the ride-a-thon will go toward training each horse to facilitate the needs of each individual rider, for upkeep of the animals and to train volunteers. All of the horses are outfitted with special equipment, such as quick-release latches attached to the saddles. The goal of the program is not to be physically therapeutic, but it has proven to also be somewhat of an emotional and mental lift, McCarty said. When they ride, people get a different perspec-

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