

Helping a Burro Find a Home *continued from front page*

Seeburger.

Interestingly, Seeburger's first burro, Cali Girl ended up back in Vernonia two years ago when she was purchased by Vernonia residents Britt and Larry Steele, who also purchased a second burro at that Great Burro Turnaround Challenge.

Apparently Seeburger has a real talent for training burros. She and Cali Girl were named "Grand Championship Overall" at the competition two years ago, and Seeburger once again won that award with Mona Lisa at this year's competition.

Cali Girl was named because she came from California. Mona Lisa got her name because she smiles, says Seeburger. "She also makes people smile. She's very comical and

really a character. She's always playing games. I'll leave the obstacles out and go in the house to get a drink and when I come back out she will have moved things around."

Mona Lisa is quite a bit smaller than Cali Girl, measuring 42 inches tall and weighing under 400 pounds, which is an average size for the herd she came from; she's a bit smaller because she is a juvenile, but will grow some in the next few years. Cali Girl was about 56 inches tall.

Seeburger says that people will purchase a burro as a pack animal, to pull a cart, for a child to show in 4-H, as a pet, and also to help guard a herd of other livestock; they will defend themselves and sheep, goats, cows, and llamas from coyotes and even cougars.

At the two day Great Burro Turnaround trainers and their burros compete in several events. First is handling and conditioning, where the trainer shows they can do basic maneuvers like leading and picking up their feet, and then the animal is inspected to make sure it looks healthy. That is followed by a showmanship and pattern class where the trainer and burro trot, sidestep, and show some more advanced training. The second day includes an "in hand trail" which is an obstacle course of challenges the trainer and burro navigate together, followed by a costume competition where the burros are dressed up and paraded. The final competition is a freestyle event where the trainers can show off the best skills their burros have mastered. Mona Lisa showed off

some of her best skills like the plank walk and jumping over barrels.

"The burros were a big hit at the State Fair," said Seeburger. "We had a ton of people coming by to see and pet them. They were really very popular."

Prior to the auction Seeburger worked hard to advertise Mona Lisa on numerous websites to let potential buyers know about her skills. "I had a lot of interest," says Seeburger. "I had over 40 calls and six people from all over Oregon come out to Vernonia to see her ahead of the auction."

Seeburger isn't the only Vernonian training a burro this year for the Great Burro Turnaround Challenge. Two new Vernonia residents, mother and daughter Tracy and Katrina Avalon, both trained burros and

auctioned them at the State Fair. "They are an excellent addition to Vernonia," said Seeburger about the Avalons.

Wild burros were likely introduced into the desert southwest in the mid 1800s to work as part of the mining boom in the region. When mines went bust and alternate means of transportation became available, the burros were often left to fend for themselves, and surprisingly have actually thrived. Seeburger says the BLM regularly has to gather wild burros because they reproduce rapidly and because of their excellent self-preservation skills, even in the harsh desert climate. The average population of burros in the Cibola-Trigo HMA is about 500.

Community Action Team: Families Get Support *continued from front page*

through Healthy Families resources.

Kathy Appel has been a home visitor with the program for a dozen years and has many success stories to share. One she thought was particularly representative involves a young Columbia County couple that participated with Healthy Families for the full three years. Not every Healthy Families family has nearly this many struggles, but this one also has a great outcome. Their child was about two weeks old on the first visit. Mom and dad were both unemployed and as a result they were at risk of losing their apartment. They had both already conquered addiction, but Mom had a long history of severe depression and was struggling even though she was taking anti-depressants. Dad had a felony conviction that made housing and employment extra challenging. They did not have much in the way of support from family and friends either.

Early on, Appel referred the family to programs at CAT to stabilize their housing until dad found work in Portland. For the first six months the visits were weekly and sometimes mom was too depressed to keep the meeting. From there the meetings were twice a

month until the child was two years old. The last year's visits were monthly. They were naturally good parents, but they were hungry for help in learning more about the appropriate activities and play for their child's development. Mom was nursing the baby, but was grateful for assistance in making that a better experience. They began making weekly trips to the library for the children's reading program. Realizing that a significant part of her depression stemmed from childhood trauma, mom connected to a counseling program that helped her heal old wounds. When she was ready to take on more, she began volunteering at a local non-profit organization. The managers liked her so much they hired her and her confidence and connections soared.

The last time Appel saw this family they were in their same home, both were working, mom's mood was stable and she was off all medications, their child is enrolled at Head Start, and they were proactively gaining on their goal of healthy living with plenty of outdoor time and exercise. Their family goal plan even includes planting a garden. Of the mother, Kathy says, "I see a light in her that wasn't there when we started."

The feedback CAT receives from participating families also points to the power of the program. A local

mom of an 18-month old son and one-month old daughter wrote a letter saying, "My home visitor gave me the guidance that I needed and then let me make my own decisions. Never once has anyone in the program judged me for my decisions. They also have given me information on stress and how to care for myself in order to make me a better mother."

The agency and program recipients appreciate community support for this vital program, so please consider donating baby wipes and diapers of all sizes.

In addition to the Healthy Families program, CAT's Child and Family Development programs include Parent Education and Support and Head Start. Parent Education and Support provides a variety of parent training and support in group settings that foster parent-to-parent interactions. Topics include things like Making Parenting a Pleasure, Divorce Education, and Strengthening Families.

Head Start is a federal program that promotes the school readiness of children from birth to age five in low-income families by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development. Head Start, like Healthy Families, emphasizes the role of parents as their child's first and most important teacher. In Columbia County there are Head Start

centers in St. Helens and Vernonia, and one center that serves both Clatskanie and Rainier.

Safe Kids is a program led by CAT's Head Start, which provides support and resources to assist adults in keeping kids safe. Based on the needs of the community, this coalition implements evidence-based programs such as car-seat checkups, safety workshops and sports clinics to help parents and caregivers prevent childhood injuries.

Community Action Team is ready to help Columbia County children thrive. To get more information about Healthy Families, please contact Program Manager Sunday Kampii at (503) 366-6556 or (800) 404-3511. For Head Start, Safe Kids, and Parent Education and Support programs, direct your questions to (503) 556-3736.

To find out more about how Community Action Team might be able to help with other services, please call (503) 397-3511 or visit www.cat-team.org. Office hours at 125 N. 17th Street in St. Helens are 8:30 am – 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday.

Leanne Murray works for Community Action Team in the Human Investment Department.

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