

# Horse gentler teaches students to train young horses rescued from Warm Springs Reservation

BY JOE SIESS  
CO Media Group

A group of ten students from around the country and from different walks of life, traveled to a ranch in Redmond last week to attend a weeklong horse training workshop from Anna Twinney, a renowned horse gentler from North Carolina.

The class took place from Saturday to Friday, at Safe Acres Sanctuary in Redmond and involved training, or gentling, feral horses rescued from the Warm Springs Reservation by the Warm Springs Horse Network.

Most of the young foals came to Redmond terrified, and had never been touched by a human. The training will ensure they adjust to humans, acclimate to domesticated life and eventually find their forever homes.

The method of training taught by Twinney is about connecting with the horse in the horse's own language, as opposed to more conventional methods of horse training which tend to be rougher and perhaps more traumatic on the horses.

A flick of the ear, a slight bending of the leg, a lowering of the head, and a gentle approach, are some of the ways horses communicate. It takes time to gain a horse's trust, but for Twinney and her students, it's all about learning to communicate with the horse on the horse's terms.

"We've misunderstood them, we've misinterpreted them, and we've taken away their freedom," Twinney said of the rescued horses. "What drives me is that interpretation, what drives me is to show the truth of how they're feeling physically, mentally, emotionally."

Twinney, who is originally from England, has dedicated her life to working with horses and teaching others how to properly interact with them. She has traveled the world teaching her methods, in places like Singapore, New Zealand, China and Morocco.

In Redmond, the progress the young horses have shown in the course of the one week class is admirable, and it was clear that Twinney's students were profoundly moved by the connections they had developed with the foals.

When Diane Holmes of California first started the class on Aug. 6, the closest she could get to young Peaches, a four-month old foal, was eating lunch outside of her pen.

Then, nearly a week later, on Aug. 12, when Holmes enters Peaches' pen, the horse dips her head and approaches slowly. With eyes welling, Holmes sings softly and rubs the horse's head. A powerful connection has been made.

"Anna's way of gentling is so beautiful. It is a dance that we learn to do to the rhythm of the foal," Holmes said. "We learn their language, and we respond to them, we thank them over and over, any time they do the least little thing we close our eyes and thank them."

"It's cracked open my heart, I spent half the time here crying," Holmes added of her time in Redmond.

Vicki Bennett of Safe Acres Sanctuary, a nonprofit dedicated to rescuing horses in need of sanctuary from abuse, neglect, or facing the slaughterhouse, said part of the purpose of the class is introducing the young horses, all of which are untouched mustangs, to humans, and training them for domesticated life.

"It's hard in the beginning of the



Dean Guernsey/Bulletin photos

CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE: Anna Twinney, horse gentler, praises Hawk, a wild mustang at Safe Acres Ranch in Redmond; building a strong bond is critical while training wild mustangs; Peaches, a wild mustang, plays with Twinney's hat during a training session; Twinney and Katie Dixon prepare Peaches, a wild mustang, for the farrier.



week, most of these babies couldn't even look at us. They were terrified. They had lost their herd and lost their mother. Some of them are three months old," Bennett said. "And now they're going to come up and greet you at the gate and be curious to meet you. And so that's our goal is to help them transition from all of the loss to finding value in their new life and in domestication and where they're headed."

Emily Sabatella, an elementary school teacher from New York, said working with horses and learning from Twinney has improved her ability to teach children, as she is more in tune with herself and others. For Sabatella, it is about entering into a partnership with the horse, but first that trust must be earned.

"There's this understanding that these horses are so intuitive and so sensitive, and so willing to be partners if we can listen to them, and understand their language," Sabatella said. "And when we take that time to really hear them and know their language, they partner with us in this profound and intense way."

Britt Keele, a contractor from North Carolina, drove across the country to Redmond for Twinney's class.

Keele said he came to the class after he adopted two mustangs from the Cedar Mountains in Utah and realized he needed to learn more about them.

"I thought I knew something about horses, and I realized I really don't know anything," Keele said.

"I started from scratch and started searching for who would be a good trainer/mentor."

That's when his search led to Twinney and her methods which attracted him given their gentler approach toward training horses.

"That's what she teaches, that's what drew me to her. It's not a training modality, it's a growth model. It's a growth mindset," Keele said.

Keele spent the week working with Annabelle, a highly intelligent horse he said took a lot of time to gain her trust. He said when he took his first class from Twinney in October, he found that working with horses helped him develop his emotional intelligence.

"I told her at the end of the month that I went there to work on my horsemanship and I ended up working on my humanship," he said. "You learn a lot about yourself standing in front of a horse...learning with them."

■ [jsieess@bendbulletin.com](mailto:jsieess@bendbulletin.com), 541-617-7820



Partners In Care

## Upcoming Grief Support Series

Partners In Care offers a variety of support services for families, friends, and the community when a loved one dies. The following series will begin in September and end in November. All conducted virtually.

### General Grief Group

8 weekly sessions beginning September 12 - 5:00 PM - 6:30 PM

### Spousal Loss Support Group

8 weekly sessions beginning September 15 - 10:00 AM - 11:30 AM

Open to the community at no cost!

Register by calling (541) 382-5882 and a Zoom registration will be emailed to you.

(541) 382-5882 [PartnersBend.org](http://PartnersBend.org)

Hospice | Home Health | Hospice House | Transitions | Palliative Care | Grief Support

## Margo Cilker



High Desert Music Hall  
Wed. Aug. 17 ~ 7:30p  
[tix/info: cascadesradiohour.com](http://tix/info:cascadesradiohour.com)