

The Journal Times

MAKE A CONNECTION

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Local News

Equine therapy center founders bucking for miracles

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Journal Times

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TOWN OF ROCHESTER — Jennifer Pape is looking for miracles to happen in her backyard.

Pape recently received approval from Racine County and the Town of Rochester Board to operate Willow Creek Ranch Inc., a therapeutic equine center planned for the back field of Pape's home at 2623 Maple Road, north of Highway D and a few miles west of the village of Rochester.

The nonprofit center is intended to serve children and adults who face physical and cognitive challenges ranging from spinal injuries, autism and cerebral palsy to attention deficit disorder.

Joining Pape in establishing the nonprofit center is Chicago resident Hally Arzola, an accountant with 10 year's experience in the financial services industry. The two met about a year ago and since learning about Pape's idea, Arzola has been so impressed that she not only is donating her business organization skills, she also purchased and donated a female horse named Libby to the fledgling center.

"She's teaching me all she knows and I'm teaching her all I know," Arzola said of the partnership.

The center will open later this month for a pilot program. Pape hopes to have regularly scheduled therapy sessions three days a week starting next spring.

Pape's experience comes from a lifelong interest in horses and through her work as outpatient coordinator for physical, occupational and speech therapy at Lakeview Specialty Hospital and Rehab located just off Highway 20 in Dover. As she learned about the benefits of equine therapy, Pape worked to get certification from the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association. She interned with the Smiles equine therapy program in Walworth County and at Lifestriders therapeutic riding center in Waukesha County.

Pape and Arzola have come up with a motto for their center — "Where life reins, miracles happen." They hope to spread the word about the benefits of physically and mentally challenged people riding horses, including improving visual orientation, attention and focus; increasing body awareness, improving posture and balance; improving self esteem and socialization and helping with muscle tone and flexibility.

“Therapeutic riding is much more than teaching someone riding skills,” Pape said.

Pape and Arzola will be relying heavily on volunteers to assist them with the venture that Pape hopes some day will become a full-time endeavor.

Volunteers can be people with or without horse experience and areas where they can help include leading horses, walking along the side of mounted riders, assisting with fundraising or serving on the board of directors for the corporation. Pape said she would also welcome volunteers with medical backgrounds.

“A lot of times for one rider to benefit from therapeutic horseback riding you will need at least two volunteers per rider, sometimes three,” Pape said.

One volunteer already on board is Denise Murphy, who works with Pape at Lakeview Specialty Hospital where Murphy is director of human resources.

“I used to be a trail guide and this is completely different, but it gets me back into my passion for horses,” said Murphy, a Tichigan resident. “For the the last four months I’ve been coming out here pretty regularly after work and you get to know the horses and their personalities. It’s been awesome. I’m excited to be a part of this.”

Also getting ready have been the horses, Arzola’s Libby and Pape’s Slapshot. The horses are being conditioned to handle such things as shifting or unsteady rider loads and the possibility of excited or scared riders who may flail their arms and legs or shriek with excitement. Pape’s youngest daughter, Kirsten, 9, already a champion barrel racer, has been serving as the test rider during the horses’s training.

Pape said that someday she hopes a pole barn with restrooms can be added at the facility in the mean time, Pape’s walk-in basement will serve as the restroom and shelter area. But with the program just beginning, Pape said she is putting out the call for financial and material assistance. On Willow Creek Ranch’s wish list are: gently used saddles; rider helmets; stirrups; gait belts reins and lead ropes. The center is also in need of lumber, hardware and toys and recreational equipment like balls, Hula Hoops, traffic cones, 5-gallon buckets, pool noodles and tennis balls.

Anyone wishing to donate may contact Pape at Willow Creek Ranch Inc., 2623 Maple Road, Burlington, WI 53105; or by phone at (262) 534-7212.

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