



Heaven's Gait Ranch Therapeutic Riding Center

Summer 2018 Newsletter

Dear Family and Friends,

Happy summer from Heaven's Gait Ranch! We hope you are doing well and enjoying the long-awaited sunshine! Although it's been some time since our last newsletter, we want you to know how grateful we are for your continued interest, enthusiasm, and support through our second year of operation. We have made some wonderful strides together in 2018, and we are looking forward to seeing you at The Hayburner Fundraiser at Newport Shores Restaurant in Port Washington, WI on Saturday, September 22nd!*

Persistence Makes for a Promising Future

As expected, our winter session started slowly after the holidays due to extreme cold, as well as freezing rain and ice. Throughout the first session of the year, we had to cancel 17 lessons due to either low wind chills or loud clamor from rain falling on the roof of the indoor arena. However, with much grit and even more salt, we successfully provided a total of 112 lessons from January through March, including 66 therapeutic riding lessons and 46 lessons in Equine Services for Heroes.

This tells us that despite unfavorable weather conditions, we have ongoing interest in our programs year-round, and our participants want to keep coming back to Heaven's Gait Ranch as long as conditions allow. With no insulation or heat in the indoor arena, we are learning how the seasons will continue to fluctuate our programs, as winter in Wisconsin will continue to present opportunities for our center to grow.

In fact, winter became an important time for us to focus on cross training and professional development, and by April I was proud to have passed my test for certification as a PATH Intl. Registered Therapeutic Riding Instructor. A personal and professional feat, we now have two PATH Certified Instructors on staff, and we are better equipped to meet increasing demand at Heaven's Gait Ranch.



Ridership Totals Continue to Grow

To give you a frame of reference, at the start of spring 2018, we had 22 riders, and by the beginning of our summer session we grew to 33. With your kindness and support, we were delighted to award four riders the Andy Mueller Memorial Scholarship this summer, and each family has expressed their gratitude in being able to see their sons and grandchildren ride. The scholarship is made possible through the generosity of donors who wish to provide financial assistance to families who qualify, and the application will be open again for participants to apply for group lessons this fall and winter.



Heaven's Gait Ranch

Therapeutic Riding Center

Equine Services for Heroes

In addition, thanks to your philanthropic giving this year, you have made it possible for 12 veterans to participate in our Equine Services for Heroes program at no cost to themselves. Two more are in the process of onboarding, and additional applications are coming in the mail through the Milwaukee Vet Center. Needless to say, we are thrilled to form more group lessons as a result. The biggest testament to this program is the fact that the veterans keep coming back to our facility, and thankfully many also volunteer as side walkers for our riders with special needs. Word is spreading, and our community is growing in a wonderful way.



Investments for the Future

In year two our Board of Directors has concentrated on sustainability and improvements for the future. One of our most noticeable enhancements is our lighting within the indoor arena. Thanks to John & Gail Morrissey, whose contribution was the driving force behind this decision, we upgraded from metal halide to LED lights in the arena. We upgraded to LED light bulb replacements -- instead of changing the light fixtures themselves -- which would have been twice as expensive. Our decision will result in a 68% reduction in energy use, and because the new bulbs are rated for either 12 years or 50,000 hours, Heaven's Gait Ranch will not have any costs associated with replacements.

Aside from solely focusing on property improvements, we have been busy analyzing program costs so that we can continue to keep the operating budget as low as possible. For instance, Brian caught an error on behalf of our workers' compensation provider, and he successfully reduced the rate from 2017, through 2018, and through 2019, resulting in an annual savings of over \$1,900.

Challenges We've Encountered This Year

While we set a solid foundation for our therapeutic riding center in the first year, we want to let you know that we have encountered some challenges in 2018 that we anticipate putting us over budget in a few, select categories. For instance, our 2017 Equine of the Year Ellie has developed a recurring eye infection, which we (and Fredonia Vet Clinic) believe is a result of rubbing on pine trees in the east paddock. Consequently, we have asked Jeremy Ebert to trim the pines up to 8ft, eliminating low branches and problematic hideouts. Nevertheless, Ellie has required more attentive and costly care,

as she needs a fly mask 24/7, as well as anti-inflammatory drugs, drops, ointments, and antihistamines multiple times a day. Of course we are not asking her to do lessons when she is not feeling well, which means that the other horses have to step up and fill her place.



In addition to Ellie, Levi has also had some health concerns this year, as he was recently diagnosed with insulin resistance and EPM. He is currently undergoing treatment, and we hope that he will be feeling better in just a couple more weeks. Although both Ellie and Levi are fully sponsored for 2018, the horse sponsorships do not include unexpected costs or extraordinary care. Because Ellie and Levi have needed more rest this summer than we anticipated, the other program horses are working hard to adjust to new riders and their various needs.



Heaven's Gait Ranch

Therapeutic Riding Center

The four horses we typically use for the veterans' group lessons are Ember, Simpson, Mac, and Jack -- all of whom require western saddles and tack for our adult riders to feel secure. When we were mostly conducting private lessons or groups of only two riders at a time, we had the flexibility to utilize our limited resources (such as only two helmets, pads, saddles etc. at a time). Now that our group lessons require all four horses to be used at one time, this year we have encountered the need for each horse to have his own saddle & tack.

Additional Necessities Requiring Attention

Another challenge we have been trying to address is the need for more volunteers. As group lessons of four riders can require up to twelve volunteers (including a lead walker and two side walkers for each rider), this means that we need a lot more people at Heaven's Gait Ranch on a weekly basis; otherwise, our wonderful volunteers who have been there for us since the beginning will begin to burn out. That being said, we have been working hard to properly pair volunteers with riders, and we are so grateful to have friends & family who have come up to give us a hand when they can.

Finally, as I write this, our tractor -- which is an integral piece of operating equipment -- is being hauled to Miller Implement Sales in St. Nansien, WI to be repaired. After getting stuck in the paddock yesterday, it was hauled out unoperational and loaded onto a trailer with the prognosis of a broken rear axle.

How You Can Help

You have been so kind and supportive through it all, and we sincerely appreciate when you ask, "how can I help?" Here are just some ways that you can not only help but also make a meaningful difference:

1. Donate to our Next Silent Auction

- We are looking for silent auction donations! Our next event is on Saturday, September 22nd from 5-9PM at Newport Shores Restaurant in Port Washington, WI. Our largest fundraiser of the year, The Hayburner has a silent auction that is imperative to its success. If you have an item that you'd like to donate, please call 920-400-0628 or send it to 940 S. Main Street, Cedar Grove, WI 53013 by Sept. 14th.

2. Join us at The Hayburner Fundraiser!

- You're Invited to The Hayburner Fundraiser at Newport Shores Restaurant located at 407 E. Jackson St., Port Washington, WI on Saturday, September 22nd from 5-9PM. (*I apologize; I had mistakenly put the 23rd on our last newsletter; however, it's *Saturday, September 22nd*.)
- Join us for live music, a silent auction, drinks, and heavy hors d'oeuvres at Newport Shores Restaurant!
- Proceeds benefit HGR's therapeutic riding programs for individuals with special needs & veterans with disabilities. Buy tickets in advance or at the door: Adults \$50 Children 12 & Under: \$20
RSVP: Call 920-400-0628 or email info@heavensgaitranch.org

3. Please remember Heaven's Gait Ranch in your estate planning.

- As a 501(c)(3), Heaven's Gait Ranch can accept tax deductible gifts of appreciated stocks, bonds, and other qualified financial instruments. Contact Brian at 920-400-0628 for more information.

Thank you again for all your prayers & support, and we look forward to seeing you at The Hayburner! Please visit our website at www.heavensgaitranch.org or call us at 920-400-0628 for more information on our programs.

Sincerely,

Margaret Mary McClaren
Founder, Executive Director

If you prefer to receive our newsletter electronically, please email us at info@heavensgaitranch.org.
Visit our website at www.heavensgaitranch.org or call (920) 400-0628 for more updates from Heaven's Gait Ranch!



Heaven's Gait Ranch Therapeutic Riding Center

Rider Highlight: Lydia Rortvedt (from her mother's perspective)

Lydia Rortvedt, age 5, was diagnosed with spastic diplegia (Cerebral Palsy) at the age of 2 that has caused mobility and balance issues.

Lydia truly enjoys her weekly riding session. It has brought her nothing but joy. She smiles from ear to ear from the time we arrive at HGR until the time we leave. She has grown with happiness, confidence, and independence the past 9 weeks.

Lydia has told us that she likes riding because it is fun and she loves all the horses. It has been fascinating to see the bond she had formed with the horses, especially Ellie.

We have seen great improvement in Lydia's balance and posture, especially in a sitting position. She is a much happier little girl on riding days. It has given her something to look forward to. I also believe that it has helped with controlling some of her emotions especially when tired.

I never thought Lydia would have the strength and balance to trot on a horse and HGR has proved me wrong. Seeing Lydia trot for the first time in a short 5 weeks of riding at HGR was simply amazing to me. It was a very proud moment for her and me alike. I was an extremely proud mom that night.

We definitely would recommend HGR to other families with disabilities. HGR is made up of wonderful individuals who have been extremely welcoming, friendly and caring to our whole family. It has been a great experience starting with the inquiry, to the intake, and now our weekly visits. It has definitely changed Lydia's life for the good in a short 9 weeks. It is so nice to see her excited to go to riding.

No parent should ever be concerned about the safety of their child while at HGR. We know Lydia is always in great hands whether Micah or Margaret Mary is her instructor for the night. All the horse leaders and side walkers are trained exceptionally and are so supportive of the rider. The horses are also so well mannered and trained. I am blown away how Lydia can use her walker right next to them and they don't completely freak out.

We are truly thankful for everyone at HGR and are so extremely happy that we have enrolled Lydia in the therapeutic riding program. HGR is a special place that we will be forever thankful for. I am so glad that Lydia's PT at Rehab Resources recommended you to us. We are excited to see what else Lydia can accomplish at HGR!

Thanks again for everything,

Jenny Rortvedt
(Lydia's Mother)

