

The Arlington Connection

Horses Helping People

THERAPEUTIC RIDING, PAGE 6

Nicole Springer riding in foreground with Nandana Raesh of Herndon and Abby Schwall of Oakton in the background.

CLASSIFIEDS, PAGE 10

PHOTO BY JOAN BRADY/JOAN BRADY PHOTOGRAPHY

Stand Up and Be Counted

GREEN VALLEY FESTIVAL, NEWS PAGE 3

Flourishing at 55+

PAGE 2

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Arlington's five 55+ centers are closed, however, virtual programs and outdoor programs are available free of charge this month and are open to all residents 55 years of age and older. Residents must pre-register to receive a link to the virtual programs and the outdoor programs. Register at registration.arlingtonva.us or by calling 703-228-4747, option 3.

VIRTUAL AND IN THE PARK PROGRAMS

Managing diabetic nutrition during the pandemic, virtual program presented by Lisa Muras, diabetes education, Virginia Hospital Center, Thursday, Sept. 17, 11 a.m. Registration #911500-01.

Music streaming services, learn how they work with Amy Collins, virtual program, Thursday, Sept. 17, 6:30-7:30 p.m. Registration # 911402-14.

Fast Forwards, fast paced walking group, Friday, Sept. 18, 9-10:30 a.m. Leave from Aurora Hills 55+ Center, 735 S. 18th Street. Registration # 911109-02.

SEPT. 21-30, 2020

Yarn Crafters group meets to knit and crochet items for the less fortunate, Monday, Sept. 21, 10 a.m. -noon, Virginia Highlands Park, 1600 S. Hayes Street. Instruction available; patterns, yarn, hooks and needles provided. Registration # 911703-02.

Genealogy 101, Tuesday, Sept. 22, 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m. Virtual program led by advanced researcher Eileen Bogdanoff. All research levels welcome. Registration # 911400-04.

Ways to prevent falls, virtual discussion with Kate Chutaup, Virginia Hospital Center, Wednesday, Sept. 23, 11 a.m. - noon. Registration # 911502-01.

Virtual Paint 'n Sip demonstration, Thursday, Sept. 24, 10-11:30 a.m. No experience necessary. Register to receive supply list and picture to paint. Registration # 911301-03.

Overview of ways to cut cable, phone and internet bills using today's technology. Virtual program led by Tech Guru Nick Englund, Thursday, Sept. 24, 11 a.m. - noon. Registration # 911403-01.

Fast paced walking group, Fast Forwards, Friday, Sept. 25, 9-10:30 a.m. Meet at Fairlington Community Center, 3308 S. Stafford St., for a two to three mile loop in the vicinity. Registration # 911109-03.

Guided hike, one to two miles along trails from Gulf Branch Nature Center and Park, 3608 N. Military Rd., Tuesday, Sept. 29, 9-11 a.m. Registration # 911009-01.

Arlington's Poet Laureate and professor of literature and languages at Marymount University, Dr. Holly Karapetkava, to present a virtual program extolling the virtues of poetry, Wednesday, Sept. 30, 11 a.m. - noon. Registration # 911300-01.

Smart home technology using automation devices, virtual program presented by Tech Guru Nick Englund, Wednesday, Sept. 30, 3 - 4 p.m. Registration # 911403-15.

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Everyone Loves a Good Parade

By SHIRLEY RUHE
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

Police cycles lead the parade down Four Mile Run Drive with antique cars wedged in the middle and two Arlington County fire engines, with sirens blaring, bookending the rear. The Nauck Antique and Classic Car Parade winds through the Green Valley neighborhood around Lowell Street and down S. Kenmore Street and eventually arrives back at Charles Drew Community Center.

This event, originally scheduled in May as the annual Nauck antique car festival, had been postponed to Aug. 29 and trans-

formed into a parade due the coronavirus. It was postponed again to Sept. 12 due to rain. This event was sponsored by the Green Valley Community Association.

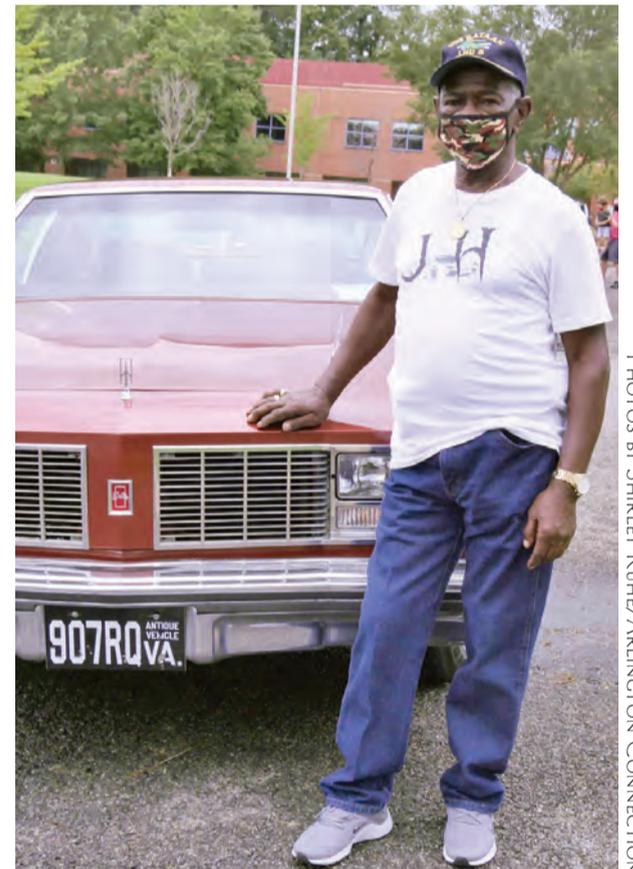
Ed Johannemann drives his maroon '79 MGB in the Nauck Antique and Classic Car Parade. He says he has three MGB's but he drove this one because, "well, my V-8 is up on a lift and I'd have to put it back together to drive it today."



John Garver is driving his '71 Chevy Nova that he has owned for five years. The Nauck Antique and Classic Car Parade was on Saturday morning, Sept. 12.



Arlington County Police Department motorcycles and Arlington County Fire Department fire trucks stand ready to join the Nauck Antique and Classic Car Parade on Saturday morning, Sept. 12.



Joe Honesty is only the second owner of his '79 Delta Oldsmobile that he has owned for three years, and drove it in the Nauck Antique and Classic Car Parade on Saturday morning, Sept. 12.

PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUHE/ARLINGTON CONNECTION

Stand Up and Be Counted

By SHIRLEY RUHE
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

Arlington's Census Palooza II hosts tables at Barcroft Apartments, Buckingham Gates of Ballston Community Center and Green Valley Charles Drew Community Center on Saturday, September 12. Volunteers wearing bright purple "Arlington Counts" T-shirts stand on the median of Glebe Road waving

passersby to the Census Palooza sites.

Joann Griffin is manning a table at Charles Drew Community Center filled with flyers, background information, and questions and answers about the 2020 Census. She says, "We just started. We have signed up three." Mid-August an estimated 24,400 Arlington households still remained to be counted.

Just down the way Romina An-

drades stands behind a table lined with neat rows of green bottles of Palmolive, sponges, large plastic jugs of bleach and Ajax. "People who fill out the Census can pick a basket and a few cleaning supplies. I've had a family of seven and a gentleman." She says, "I think Arlington has 76 percent of people who have filled out the Census but we're going after the hard to reach 24 percent."

SEE STAND UP, PAGE 4



Romina Andrades offers a basket and cleaning supplies for families who have completed the 2020 Census.

By SHIRLEY RUHE/ARLINGTON CONNECTION

Stand Up and Be Counted

FROM PAGE 3

An ice chest, manned by Chris DeRosa, sits on the ground between the two tables. It has been filled with drumsticks, ice cream specialties and drinks in colorful pouches by the “peace, love and ice cream” truck at the edge of the parking lot for the families who have filled out the Census. Two- and a half year old Zack Fanning climbs out of his stroller and carefully selects a silver Honest pouch out of the ice chest.

Kelvin Maurs, Executive Director of Arm & Arm, a peer counseling group for formerly incarcerated prisoners, is there to encourage community members to sign up for the Census. He says, “I’m not going to find them here. I grab someone who can speak Spanish and go out in the neighborhood. I’ve been walking around over there and connecting at the barber shop.”

He says language can be a barrier. “You have to get trust and convince people why this is important. People can be suspicious. I was just talking to two guys and one was on



Be counted. Sign up for the Census before the end of September

board but the other one gave me the eye. So I gave the first one my phone number so I could get him to come.”

The Constitution requires the



Kelvin Maurs, Executive Director of Arm & Arm, says he walks around the Green Valley neighborhood to find people where they are and convince them to fill out the census.

U.S. to conduct a Census which counts every person living in the United State once a decade. This information is used as a basis for allocating the number of seats in Congress as well as for allocation



Zack Fanning chooses an Honest juice from the ice chest full of treats from the “peace, love, and ice cream” truck at Green Valley.

PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUIHE/ARLINGTON CONNECTION

ernment intrusion and violation of privacy, and language barriers. In addition, a newly imposed September deadline has shortened the time allowed for completion of the Census.

If you have not taken the Census there are several options for completion.

Online: Go to my2020census.gov where you can complete in English or select a different option at the bottom of the page.

Phone: call 844-330-2020 for English, 844-468-2020 for Spanish. Phone numbers are also available in 13 languages including Russian, Japanese, Vietnamese and Arabic.

Mail: If you received a paper copy by mail, just fill it out and mail it back in the envelope provided.

In person: A census person may knock at your door. In addition there are Mobile Questionnaire Assistance stations such as the pop-up locations that will be announced around Arlington weekly through September.

of state, federal and local funds for such things as schools, hospitals and public utilities.

Filling out the Census generally takes only a few minutes. However, there can be a number of obstacles including the challenges posed by the pandemic, lack of information, suspicion about gov-



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Joann Griffin and Ahmed Scego man a census information table at the Arlington Census Palooza event held at Charles Drew Community Center on Saturday, September 12.

BULLETIN

Submit civic/community announcements at ConnectionNewspapers.com/Calendar. Photos and artwork welcome. Deadline is Thursday at noon, at least two weeks before the event.

FRIDAY/SEPT. 18

Native Trees for the Urban Home Landscape. 10 – 11:30 a.m., Online. Trees on private residential properties comprise a significant proportion of the urban forest canopy cover for a city or county. The environmental benefits to the community of a healthy well-distributed urban tree canopy depend in no small part upon the efforts of thousands of homeowners to care for mature trees and plant new ones in their own yards. Extension Master Gardener Amy Crumpton will discuss best practices for caring for trees, how to assess your site's conditions for new tree plantings, and how to select from the many native tree species that thrive in our area. Free. RSVP at <https://mgvn.org/events/> to receive link to participate.

SUNDAY/SEPT. 20

Fall Civil War Show and Sale. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. At Arlington-Fairfax Elks Lodge. The event is sponsored by the Frank Stringfellow Camp # 822 of the Sons of Confederate Veterans. Vendors are welcome. They have 25, 8-foot tables available on a first-come first-served basis. The table fee is \$75 per table. Information and vendor information may be obtained from Bud Mayo, Commander, Frank Stringfellow Camp at 703-389-1505 or mayo5304@cox.net.

SATURDAY/SEPT. 26

International Coastal Cleanup. 9-1:30 p.m. At Barcroft Park, 4200 S. Four Mile Run Drive, Arlington. They will identify trees and their seeds as they collect, bag, and label them for transport to the VDOF. Good for families and anyone interested in trees and replenishing our forests. Email volunteer@ecoactionarlington.org

SATURDAY/SEPT. 26

Virtual Studio Tour. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Visit over 40 artist studios virtually during the Arlington Visual Art Studio Tour. Visit 30 studios via YouTube starting Sept. 24, and more via Facebook on Sept. 26 and 27. Visit www.arlingtonartstudiotour.org.

FALL CLASSES AT ARLINGTON ARTS CENTER

Arlington Arts Center (AAC) is offering Fall 2020 art classes for novice and seasoned artists of all ages, from children to adults. AAC's classes will be held primarily online this fall, but they will be offering one small and special in-person Drawing and Mixed Media class for ages 8-10. Enrollment will be capped at 8 so sign up early. Visit the website <https://arlingtonartscenter.org/education/>

TUESDAYS THRU OCTOBER

FRESHFARM Farmers Market. 3-7 p.m. At The Grounds, 1102 South Eads Street, Arlington. The National Landing BID is teaming up with nonprofit FRESHFARM to bring the farmers market back to Crystal City every Tuesday at a new location to accommodate for social distancing. Visit the website: <https://nationallanding.org/do/fresh-farm-farmers-market>

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HORSES HELPING PEOPLE

Horses and the People they Help

If you aren't familiar with how horses are helping people, read on.

BY JOAN BRADY
THE CONNECTION

"I knew that is what I needed for my soul."

Perri Wight Green of McLean was riding horses before she could talk. She tried out for the US Equestrian Olympic team in 1978, where she placed 16th. The first 12 made the team.

It was a freak horse accident that won her a trip to the emergency room and the shocking diagnosis of metastasized ovarian cancer. That diagnosis was followed by additional findings of four brain tumors. The tumors and their removal impacted her mobility and therefore her ability to ride. Four months in, she wanted to be back on a horse. "I knew that is what I needed for my soul."

It was a friend who introduced her to Sprout, sproutcenter.org, which allowed her to return to the joy of riding while rehabbing, and helped her keep muscles strong.

"I've lost strength and endurance," says Green since the pandemic and stay-at-home order kept her from getting to Sprout. Not riding had been a real set-back for her state of mind as well, but she has delighted in the online activities created by Sprout which have kept her inspired, connected and entertained during the shutdown.

Therapeutic riding and hippotherapy can be greatly beneficial for children and adults with challenges like those on the spectrum and with physical disabilities. The movement of a horse's pelvis is tri-planar, mirroring the movement of a person walking. That means riding simulates walking, which causes the central nervous system to stimulate the muscles as if the rider him/herself is walking which can improve motor function and core strength.

A horse's body temperature is 1-2°F hotter than a human's temperature, which can help decrease muscle spasticity and hypertonicity.

The rider gets repetition, but not in a way that might be boring, as in a typical clinical setting with a balance ball. Clients are able to practice and refine balance responses on a horse, which leads to improvements in muscle control. And no surprise, riding a horse is far more motivating with the added benefit of expanding social network through interaction with not just the horse, but the team of instructors and volunteers.

"WATCHING PARENTS see their child doing something that they didn't think they would ever be able to do..." Kate White's voice trailed off as she was transported back to the barn and to watching parents who, for an hour or so, could watch their child freed from everyday difficulties through therapeutic horsetack riding.

White began as a volunteer when her high school aged son needed service hours. He completed his time and went off to college; White never left. Once she felt that magic, she wanted to be a part of it, going on to become a certified instructor and ultimately teaming up with Davorka (Dada) Suvak of



Riding was always important to Perri Wight Green of McLean, shown here riding "Crafty Craig" in 1978.

Reston to co-found Spirit Open Equestrian Program, www.spiritequestrian.org, in Herndon.

Equine Assisted Therapies also include the lesser known equine assisted psychotherapy which can help with anxiety and depression, trauma-related issues, traumatic brain injury and eating disorders. And, apparently, it can also be an effective tool used in marriage counseling. The therapy is experiential, with clients having a multi-scenery experience that can help create opportunities for understanding and healing, according to experts.

The Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship Intl (PATH) boasts 873 accredited member centers and more than 4,700 credentialed professionals internationally. These member centers serve approximately 86,900 children and adults, including more than 6,700 veterans. Locally, there are seven programs in Northern Virginia and approximately ten more in DC and Maryland.

For riders and their immediate families, certified instructors, hippotherapists, equine assisted psychotherapists, volunteers and staff all help create communities, with benefits that can be as important as the riding itself.

Founders, directors, clients and their families, psychotherapists and volunteers all struggled to maintain connection and both physical and emotional strength during the lock-down.

"It's been miserable," David Jerome of Haymarket says of the stay-at-home order that has kept him away from his volunteer work at Sprout Therapeutic and Riding Center in Aldie. "[I missed] seeing the students and seeing the joy they get out of [riding]."

Like all businesses, these non-profit programs had to refocus. They are typically fueled by client fees that are greatly subsidized by grants and individual and corporate donations.

While each of the programs I spoke with has cut costs wherever possible and qualified for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP)

to pay some full-time employees, the horses still have to eat and facilities needed to be maintained. In Sprout's case, they lost more than two hundred and fifty volunteer hours each month in horse and facility care. Waldron and her lean full-time staff tirelessly filled in. Each of the programs had the same challenge.

Financially, income from riders was non-existent for several months, and much of the grant monies were either deferred or went away completely as grantors re-evaluated priorities in the face of the pandemic. Each of the programs has had to rethink budgets and fundraising efforts in order to ensure continued existence, all while continuing to maintain connections to their clients



Katie White with "Handsome" at Spirit Open Equestrian Program in Herndon.

and the rest of their communities. They have gotten creative and have benefited from strong community involvement, but it's not enough to cover losses incurred as a result of the coronavirus.

Each program has researched, created and funded new protocols for keeping everyone safe. All of which takes time and money.

Davorka (Dada) Suvak, co-founder and director of Spirit Open Equestrian in Herndon, articulated what I heard from the directors of all of the programs I spoke with as they look forward, not back: "If you hold yourself to the past, you prevent yourself from growth and real improvement." These programs and their leaders are nothing, if not creative and tenacious.

There are quite a few programs in the DC Metro area, this series highlights just a few. All of the programs included are 501(c)(3) nonprofits. If you are interested in getting involved, please visit each program's websites.

- ❖ Sprout Therapeutic and Riding Center in Aldie
- ❖ Bridle Paths in Leesburg
- ❖ Spirit Open Equestrian in Herndon
- ❖ Northern Virginia Therapeutic Riding in Clifton
- ❖ Lift Me Up! In Great Falls
- ❖ If you are interested in learning more about equine assisted therapies: Therapeutic Riding Association of Virginia PATH International.

Talking to Ty The 21-year-old Paint Gelding is a great listener.

BY JOAN BRADY
THE CONNECTION

"It's hard to be eleven and a little quirky," says Tahlia Enstrom's mom, Shira. "[Tahlia] knows she is a little different and she sometimes feels the pressure to fit in." Tahlia started riding at Bridle Paths when she was eight years old. The Enstroms live in Vienna.

Tahlia's enthusiasm for Bridle Paths is, well, unbridled, "I enjoy how nice they are. How they accept every member of my family. Even Anders, my little brother." Tahlia and her family live in Vienna. Tahlia likes to talk to Ty, her special horse there. She is comfortable telling Ty what happened with friends and other things in her life. She explains that while, "he doesn't say anything back, it's nice to have someone to talk to." Ty doesn't necessarily

look at her when she is talking, but she knows he is listening, because he perks his ears up when she speaks. What's it like to converse with Ty? "It feels amazing."

Katie Fallon (Leesburg), founder and president of Bridle Paths, struggled that clients could no longer come to the farm in Leesburg. Bridle Paths is a small program, with clients split between therapeutic riders and those who come for equine assisted psychotherapy, for challenges including traumatic brain injury, trauma, anxiety and depression.

A survey done about a month into the lockdown showed that about fifty percent of Bridle Paths' clients were suffering from emotional and mental health challenges like anxiety and feelings of being disconnected, due to the virus. Nearly that number missed the community that Bridle Paths provides.

Fallon described herself as a caveman as it relates to technology, but Shira Enstrom

says she is selling herself short and that Fallon had kept the community well connected through pictures and videos in email and on social media.

Even still, the past few months have been very hard for Tahlia, who started riding when she was eight. Now eleven, riding has been an important part of her weekly routine. She was excited when the Phase One opening meant she could go the farm and have a quick, outdoor visit with Ty. And she is thrilled to be back on her regular schedule at the farm now that Virginia is in Phase Three.

"It's so great to groom [Ty] and ride him again. Covid may have a lot of power but it can't separate me and Ty!"

Tahlia Enstrom of Vienna with Ty at Bridle Paths in Leesburg.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Horses as Co-Therapists?

Introducing Equine Assisted Psychotherapy.

Dr. Ioana Marcus, LPC, Gestalt Equine Psychotherapist already had quite a few letters after her name when she took a course in trauma-focused Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) and volunteered at a trauma-focused equine-assisted psychotherapy program in Texas.

Marcus, who lives in Arlington, says that after just a few months of seeing the children's progress, she was blown away. And that sent her on a path to integrate equine-assisted psychotherapy into her psychotherapy practice. Since then, she marvels, she has "seen that process over and over. Where traditional therapy can make kids and adults shut down, [working with horses] provides opportunities to engage differently."

For equine-assisted psychotherapy clients, riding is generally not part of the session, instead, the client spends time interacting with the horse, guided by a licensed psychotherapist. Marcus is as much an expert on horses and equine-assisted psychotherapy as she is a traditional psychotherapist. She uses equine-assisted psychotherapy the way she might use music or art therapy.

"Clients can sometimes be resistant to the [traditional] therapeutic relationship," says Marcus, "but they can develop a different relationship with the horses." Understanding why and how equine-assisted psychotherapy works requires a bit of understanding about horses. According to Marcus, unlike dogs who accept and love us unconditionally, horses are prey animals, always scanning for potential threats in their environment.

If a threat is encountered, it may trigger a flight response, making their behavior similar to a person's trauma response. By watching the way the horses behave on their own and interact with other horses, clients can



Katie Fallon and Beth Ratchford.

both relate and connect to the horse in areas of vulnerability.

That makes sense, but what was surprising was the way Marcus says horses respond to the emotional state of humans. "If we come incongruent, whether with guarded emotions or anger, even if we try to hide it, [the horse] picks up on that energy through our heart rate and other physiological senses and the horse takes it as a threat to their own survival and well being."

As co-therapists, their response and feedback, according to Marcus, are not biased by human perceptions and cognitions. "Horses who are more versed [as equine therapists], are more intentional in their responses, and [instead of running away] may challenge and support the client to get to that vulnerability."

How do they do it? "They might nudge, or lean into the client trying to get the client to be more honest. At the same time, their touch can be soothing and calming. Numerous studies have supported positive physio-

logical responses in humans when horses are present, such as reduced cortisol levels and increased heart rate variability."

Working with horses adds its own set of complexities. "Horses have their own feelings, they thrive, like we do, when they can give us consent," according to Marcus. Which is to say that the horse is not just a prop. If the horse is in a bad mood, Marcus doesn't push the horse to participate in a session. But, she may use the horse's mood as a starting point for conversation.

"It's really meaningful work," she says, "I leave sessions with a sense of gratitude."

Dr. Marcus' private practice, Equibllis, has an office in Reston (She lives in Arlington). Her co-therapist horses reside in Nokesville, Va.

Her practice is focused on working with clients with eating disorders, trauma, anxiety and depression and the developmental trauma that can come with adoption. She is an associate professor of counseling with Marymount University.

Equine Assisted Psychotherapy

There are also equine assisted therapy programs in the area that offer equine assisted psychotherapy including:

❖ Spirit Open Equestrian at Frying Pan Park in Herndon. The program has a contract with Fairfax County which refers youth to Spirit for equine assisted psychotherapy with Jocelyn Jones, LPC (McLean). Jones works with adult and children private clients, as well. Jones sees clients some of whom have difficulty addressing their anger, have low distress tolerance and suffer from anxiety.

Jones, like Marcus, stresses the impact of the multi-sensory experience which she says, "can distract the mind, making it easier to talk about traumatic or distressing experiences." In a specific example, it was the shared experience of listening to the very loud chewing of the horse that cracked the window to building a trusting relationship between the horse, a client and ultimately Jones. In other cases, it's the tactile experience of petting the horse or the active experience of grooming the horse that opens the lines of communication. The role of the horse is adapted based on the need of the client.

❖ BRIDLE PATHS (Leesburg). Bridle Paths has a program for military service personnel

as well as opportunities for individuals who have experienced trauma. Licensed therapist, Beth Ratchford LCSW, MA, EAGALA Certified Mental Health Specialist and Dr. Jacqueline Cleland, Psy.D., PLLC work closely with Katie Fallon, founder and executive director of Bridle Paths. "I've seen clients move forward in their addiction recovery, get clarity about relational boundaries, be able to connect with a painful part of their story, in a way they couldn't before ... all because of the work with the horses," says Ratchford of her work with clients who have experienced trauma.

❖ NORTHERN VIRGINIA THERAPEUTIC RIDING (Clifton): NVTRP offers Equine Assisted Activities and Therapy services where clients work with a horse, a mental health professional and an equine specialist. These sessions are unmounted, meaning that clients don't ride the horse. NVTRP has several community partnerships working with youth at risk and military service personnel. Goals may include working with the horses to work on mental health issues, increasing confidence, problem solving and team building.

Additional Reading on Equine Assisted Psychotherapy can be found on Dr. Ioana Marcus' website.

HORSES HELPING PEOPLE

‘I Don’t Care If the Horse Poops on Me!’

One mom’s commitment to helping her son to get back to therapeutic riding.

BY JOAN BRADY
THE CONNECTION

“I teared up the first time [Jimmy] got on the horse, he was so excited.”

“When your child is young and has a diagnosis, you try anything,” says Rachel Kirkland. Her son Jimmy is diagnosed on the spectrum and, at nine, was considered non-verbal. While he had some physical challenges as well, his parents were primarily concerned about his ability to communicate.

But once they decided on therapeutic riding, the waiting game began. It took a year for a slot to open up at Northern Virginia Therapeutic Riding (NVTRP) in Clifton.



Jimmy Kirkland reuniting with “Monkey Business,” or as he is inexplicably nicknamed, Pierre, at Northern Virginia Therapeutic Riding Program in Clifton.

ership and curriculum on what it means to be a good citizen. While multi-talented, no, Teddy doesn’t drive the Ford.

Full-sized horses travel with NVTRP to a local memory care facility for visits too. Several months ago, Gallagher received a letter from the daughter of a patient, explaining what the visit with the horses meant to her and her father, who has Alzheimer’s. The visits, she said, bring him so much joy, and return him, at least a little, to himself.

Northern Virginia Therapeutic Riding is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year. It’s been a hard year to be running a capital campaign, but Kelsey Gallagher, executive director, is committed to finding a path forward to build an indoor ring. Without one, only the independent therapeutic riders are able to ride during the harsh winter months.

Like everyone, NVTRP has had to bend and grow to continue to serve its community during the pandemic.

NVTRP’s partnership with George Washington University meant that they had access to GW Occupation therapy students, who developed and created exercise videos to help clients keep up their strength. There have been weekly links of articles and puzzles.

“Teddy Time” is a fan favorite, with live video of that sweet miniature horse Teddy. NVTRP used this time to “Teach clients and volunteers about things they don’t normally get a chance to talk about,” says Gallagher, “Things like horse nutrition and how you check a horse’s pulse.” Her son has gotten involved, reading horse related picture books to Teddy for clients of all ages to enjoy.

“Good Night Farm” gave clients and volunteers and their families the opportunity to come in their pajamas to view (from their cars) the horses’ evening activities including dinner, baths and getting ready for bed.

For Jimmy, it was a very special treat, he had not been to the barns since the lock-down and, according to his mom, even though he wasn’t there to ride, just being there removed some of his anxiety, making his return to ride a “when,” not and “if.”

While he didn’t come in his pj’s, at 19, it was well before his bedtime, his mom described his reaction to once again being at the barn. “His face was pure joy.”

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Who doesn’t want to see a picture of an adorable tiny horse? Teddy the Rough Rider at Northern Virginia Therapeutic Riding Program in Clifton.

At NVTRP, when a client starts, family and professionals all come together to do an assessment of the client’s needs to help inform that therapeutic riding plan. In Jimmy’s case, his occupational and speech therapists both participate. The assessment is repeated every year.

Nine year later, while he certainly sits correctly on the horse when he rides, his biggest gains have been in his expressive and reception communications. “He learned from riding that communication has purpose,” says his mom proudly.

“He has learned to follow instructions and to give verbal directions to the horse.”

Kirkland explained: “He must respond to prompts from his instructor in order to get on to the next activity. And he wants to get to that next activity, so he complies. And he has learned the importance of using a voice at the proper sound level, to direct the horse effectively.”

Jimmy deeply loves the horses. And he definitely has favorites, Like Maybelle. “Every time I’ve been out to see him [riding] his face is absolutely pure joy,” says Kirkland.

The stay-at-home order was hard. Jimmy has received postcards and emails which have helped. But it’s definitely not the

same.

And because he requires two side-walkers to ensure he stays safely on the horse, as well as someone to lead the horse, it’s not been considered virus-safe for him to return to riding as of yet.

His mom was determined to help figure out a way to get Jimmy back to riding and began training as a sidewalker in August. Pre-training, Kirkland was equally resolute and squeamish, “I don’t know if I need to buy boots.

I don’t really like the heat. But oh my gosh I’m going to walk alongside [so Jimmy can go back to riding], I don’t care if the horse poops on me!” Jimmy’s sixteen year old brother and a friend trained alongside with Kirkland. Now, a return to riding is just weeks away for Jimmy.

In addition to therapeutic riding, NVTRP offers equine assisted activities and therapy services where clients work with a horse, a mental health professional and an equine specialist.

NVTRP has found ways to bring the equine experience to populations who might not be able to get out to Clifton. Theodore the Rough Rider is a miniature horse who travels in his specially modified Ford Expedition to locations including memory care facilities and the Washington School for Girls where he is used to support lead-

HORSES HELPING PEOPLE

Leading by Example Equine Assisted Learning teaches critical life skills.

BY JOAN BRADY
THE CONNECTION

Davorka (Dada) Suvak, co-founder and director of Spirit Open Equestrian Program at Frying Pan Park in Herndon, made Equine Assisted Learning a top priority. The programs, available for youth, families and corporate and other groups, each use the interactions between horses and humans to encourage personal growth and development and to improve basic life skills, according to Spirit's website. But after interviewing a few of the teenagers and their parents who participate in the youth program, that barely scratches the surface of the value this program can bring.

Learning basic riding skills, grooming, tacking and barn skills as well as providing assistance for the therapeutic riding program are merely a backdrop for what is happening.

Riders in the Equine Assisted Learning program have significant responsibilities, "We get here before classes start, feed, groom, tack and exercise horses," Meagan Hosker, 16, explained. "Best part is getting to hang out with awesome people, like Nicole."

Her mom, Claire, got to the heart of what it has meant as a parent, "The program teaches excellent time management skills without even having them aware. How else would these students be able to accomplish all their successes with higher grades, horse management, other school commitments, and learn and support the Spirit program?"

When therapeutic riding classes are in session, the more experienced EALs side-walk (spotting and/or physically supporting riders), lead horses for riders who are not able to fully control them and some EALs are in training as assistant instructors.

Danielle Springer, who is getting ready to go off to college in the Fall, has watched her sister's joy of therapeutic riding for many years. So a few years ago, when she was looking for an activity for herself, getting involved at Spirit was an obvious choice.

Danielle values having had the opportunity to develop her leadership skills, "I feel like I have the personality for a leader. But I sometimes need help in focusing my attention," she said. "[As an assistant instructor] you have to watch at most five kids [at the same time]," which she acknowledged can be a challenge, "You learn to look at both the small things and the

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"Best part is getting to hang out with awesome people, like Nicole." Nicole Springer of Sterling and Meagan Hosker of Reston with Huckleberry.



Dada Suvak of Reston instructing Nicole Springer (Sterling), during her riding lesson at Spirit Equestrian in Frying Pan Park in Herndon. Suvak is founder and director of Spirit.

Picture perfect posture. Sarah B on Buttercup at Spirit, at Frying Pan Park in Herndon.

Nicole Springer is all smiles now that she is back on "her" horse and with her friends, "the EAL girls" at Spirit Equestrian in Herndon.

PHOTO BY
JOAN BRADY
JOAN BRADY PHOTOGRAPHY



bigger picture." And communication is critical for keeping everyone moving and safe, "You are in charge of the five riders, then you have volunteers and EALs walking with them," and that can be a lot, she says.

Danielle recognizes how those skills translate to an office job or the hospital she hopes to work in when she completes her nursing degree. There are going to be times, she says, "where [I] may have a task and need to manage and motivate a group to reach an end goal."

Abby Schwall of Oakton is just 16, but with the grace and poise of a much older young woman. "One thing that is special about the horses here," says Schwall, "is that the majority of them are rescue horses. So you don't know how they are going to react to certain situations, [which means] you have to make sure you can handle whatever they are going to throw at you. [That has taught me] to be able to maintain my cool.

So now it's a lot easier to handle situations I'm not used to or comfortable with."

And while these EAL girls, as the young clients refer to them, are growing themselves, they are providing wonderful role models for

young riders there, who cherish their friendships and aspire to one day become EALs themselves.

Nicole Springer of Sterling, treasures the friendships she has made with the EALs, who help out during her riding sessions. When the virus hit, it was very hard. She choked up as she described what it was like for all those months. "I was sad.

I cried a few times. Because that is one of the biggest things I miss during this whole thing." Her mom, LJ, agrees that it had been hard, sharing that Nicole had missed Buttercup, the horse she rides and the EALs equally.

Born with low muscle tone (hypotonia), which impacts both her fine and gross motor skills, Springer's parents recognized how important it was for her to build key muscle strength and signed her up for therapeutic horseback riding when she was nine years old.

A bubbly college student now, Nicole is proud of how far she has come. "It made me stronger. I can jump rope now and I can play basketball more easily." And now she is an independent rider, which is a big achievement. Parents of therapeutic riders echo the same joy that while riding has improved physical strength and skills, it has

also had an impact on confidence and self esteem.

During the stay-at-home order, Suvak hosted a weekly Zoom where the entire Spirit community could come together. According to Susan B., her daughter, 10-year-old Sarah couldn't wait to catch up with Suvak, the EALs and the horses. Her calendar marked each week, Sarah made sure her homework was done and the table was set in time.

When hippotherapy, horse related physical therapy, was recommended as a companion to Sarah B's traditional physical therapy. Her parents knew they had their work cut out for them. At three-years-old she wasn't very steady on her feet, which made her fearful of things that might knock her over, and horses are big, especially when you are so little.

So for the year she was on the Spirit waitlist, they found every opportunity to get Sarah excited about horses. Pony rides available at the fair, they were on it. Vacation pony rides, sign them up. Sarah started to enjoy the ponies. But despite all of the preparation, on that first day at Spirit, Sarah's parents were apprehensive and then, suddenly she was up on the horse, "excited and comfortable," her

mom says.

Alongside traditional physical therapy, there has been great improvement over the years. Parents can all relate to having to nag their children, and being ignored. For Sarah's mom, Susan, it was heartening to see Sarah respond immediately to Director Davorka (Dada) Suvak's admonishments to sit up straight on the horse. Now ten, Sarah's posture is perfect and she rides independently, controlling the horse herself.

Her confidence has grown and she has set goals for herself. She aspires to one day be an EAL and she hopes to transition from therapeutic riding to traditional riding.

In addition to the therapeutic riding clients served by Spirited Open Equestrian Program, Spirit's equine-assisted psychotherapist works with children referred by Fairfax County's Children's Community Services Act. The CSA helps children and families access support services when a child struggles with serious emotional or behavioral problems and equine assisted psychotherapy is one of the therapies used in that effort. Private pay clients can also participate in equine assisted psychotherapy at Spirit. You can read more about it here.

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-Werner Heisenberg

HORSES HELPING PEOPLE

Turning Possible into Possibilities

When therapy was needed during quarantine, Sprouts provided a way.

BY JOAN BRADY
THE CONNECTION

A muscle pull for most of us, might be annoying, but certainly not catastrophic. But for Rachael Wessel of Ashburn, pulling a muscle was a crushing blow.

Wessel, who was born with cerebral palsy (CP), has high muscle tone (hypertonia), muscle spasms and stiffness, and poor muscle control all of which can make the activities of daily living challenging or even impossible.

For her, a muscle pull was enough to derail her life. Alongside traditional physical therapy, Wessel has participated in therapeutic horseback riding since she



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Turning possible into possibilities: Rachael Wessel on her hay horse in her garage.

“Riding takes my physical therapy to the next level,”

was just four years old.

“Riding takes my physical therapy to the next level,” Wessel, now 35, says. “[The movement of the horse] gives me the sensation of walking. Because of my inability

to move that way [on my own], my hips need that engagement, so they don’t tighten up.” She also uses her legs and reins to direct and steer the horse, engaging additional muscles. And the riding experience is fun, which definitely sets it apart from traditional physical therapy. Riding for Wessel is her only opportunity to feel “independent and free.”

But when she pulled a muscle, SEE TURNING, PAGE 11

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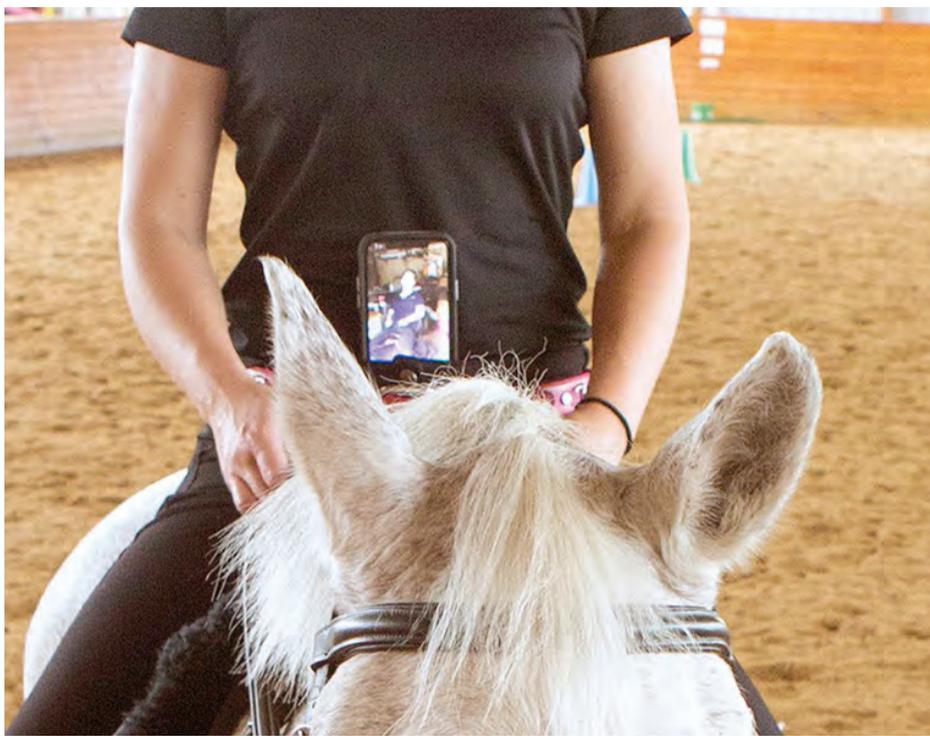


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Where there's a will, there's a way: Brooke Waldon riding Buggie with Rachael Wessell on Facetime.

Turning Possible into Possibilities

FROM PAGE 10

riding was suddenly painful. And while she had been riding independently for years, suddenly she needed side-walkers to control her horse. The new limitations were devastating.

But a move to a different riding program meant fresh eyes on the problem. And within ten minutes of riding at Sprout Therapeutic and Educational Riding, in Aldie, Wessell was once again riding off-lead and fully in control of Buggie, a flea-bitten grey horse. She described how it felt, saying she was overjoyed, grinning the whole time and thinking, "I've still got it!"

And the solution, well it was fairly simple, Buggie's girth was better suited to Wessell's physiology. Turning possible into possibilities, that's the way Brooke Waldron, founder and executive director approaches every potential barrier.

The move to Sprout not only allowed Wessell to regain her independence while on a horse, but has also enriched her life in many ways. "[Sprout] was, before the virus, about 50% of my life outside of my home," Wessell says. She rides, she socializes with the staff and volunteers, she is an ambassador, speaking at fundraising events and, a graphic designer, she does some design work as well.

When the coronavirus shut Sprout down, Wessell saw her world close down with it. Within a few weeks, she was suffering both physically and emotionally.

Waldron and her team quickly created a host of opportunities to keep Wessell and the rest of the Sprout community motivated and connected. Every week there were motivational speakers, virtual exercise classes and, for the adults, book clubs and happy hours. There were Facetime and Zoom visits with horses, emails and social media updates with pictures and videos, quizzes and even a "quarantine classic" where clients could use any mobile device, wheelchair, etc, to complete an obstacle course and share their videos.

Wessell participated in all of the online

activities, but none could replace the level of strengthening and stretching of horseback riding. "I was hurting. I was losing some ability to do daily living skills," she told Waldron.

Undaunted by the enormous challenge of creating what riding had to offer without a horse, Brooke sprung into action. Hours later, Wessell was shocked by what she saw coming up her front walk. It was Waldron, with a large suitcase on wheels and a saddle under her arm. She explained that inside the suitcase was a bale of hay, which was to become Rachael's pandemic horse, or, as Wessell refers to it, her "hay horse."

Wessell admits to being skeptical. Would it be scratchy? Would it work? Would it be fun? But she trusted Brooke and with help, she gamely mounted her newly saddled "horse," which is a similar width to Buggie. And, happily, the suitcase-like container, kept the scratchiness at bay. "I was stuck inside," says Wessell, "But Brooke brought Sprout to me."

Wessell, who has recently returned to the barn, had regular virtual lessons using Facetime, with Waldron on Buggie and Wessell seeing the view from the rider perspective, as she mimicked the leg, arm, hand movements from her hay horse.

While it wasn't as good as being able to spend time on Buggie, everything Waldron did helped to keep Wessell engaged with the world outside of her home and helped maintain much of that all-important muscle strength. "Brooke takes me through a regular lesson. [and it's like I'm] transported to the barn. Sometimes I steer and she mirrors me, sometimes she drives."

While thrilled to be back on Buggie, Wessell is clear that without those virtual lessons, she would be much worse off physically. And she really appreciates Waldron's creative problem solving, which holds no bounds.

"I need all that adaptive equipment, so that I can gallop off into the sunset on Buggie."

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And So It Begins



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Eleven years, six months and two weeks, approximately, after being diagnosed with "terminal" cancer: stage IV non small cell lung cancer, I have begun my treatment for stage IV papillary thyroid cancer. I'll be taking three pills a day, all at once, same time every day. The list of possible side effects are as long and scary as it presumably gets (blood clots, arrhythmia, to highlight just a few). I doubt its bluster. Likely somewhere between it depends and probably. Every patient is different of course so what happens next - to me, can only be forewarned. It cannot be foretold - with any kind of certainty, that is.

What I've read about these straight-on effects so far is somewhere along the lines of the cancer untreated would be worse so pick your poison, I suppose. I didn't exactly pick, but the poison - euphemistically speaking

if not literally, which has been prescribed, arrived by mail at my home as of 1:30 this afternoon and I see no reason to wait. Gulp. Let us go forth in hope because there are no guarantees here. The guarantees left the building late Feb., 2009 with my initial diagnosis. Maintaining a positive attitude and a good sense of humor has to remain my not-to-so-secret weapon. Granted, wishing and thinking a thing doesn't make it so, but moaning and groaning about it will be neither productive nor prudent. It would simply reinforce a negative and as Brian Dennehy (a.k.a. "Cobb") said in the movie "Silverado" about a completely different subject: "We can't be having none of that now, can we?"

I think the reason I'm meandering about here and in life is that I don't have a clear understanding of my prognosis yet, though I have asked. Moreover, since my new normal has only just begun, I don't have my routine down and as a result, the treatment process has not become second nature. And until it's no longer first nature, I'll be more preoccupied and cognizant of what I'm doing and why, and when I should be doing it. Primarily, this confusion/series of arrangements has to do with coordinating taking the three thyroid cancer pills with my current and pre-existing - going back 11-plus years, pill regimen which involves upwards of 60 pills daily. It's not overly complicated. It's just new and some pills shouldn't be taken together as is the case with the synthroid medication, the anti-nausea pill and additionally, not all pills can be taken with food, without food and so forth. I realize this isn't rocket science, but my life sort of depends on it, so it's kind of important that I pay attention to what and when I'm ingesting.

And it's this newness that is scary because it represents the great unknown - for me: Will the side effects be debilitating, life changing? Will they be treatable/manageable? Will my life expectancy once again be front and center as I wobble back and forth from lab work, diagnostic scans and follow-up appointments? Previously I sort of knew where I stood. Now, I don't really know anything. Oddly enough, having been there and done that is not as comforting as I would have anticipated.

Even though I've switched over - so to speak, from lung cancer to thyroid cancer, I can't really say I've experienced a "Serenity now-" type moment. I'm not nearly so confident in my outcome now as I sort of was when I

only had lung cancer. Being diagnosed with a 'new' cancer, 11-plus years in the presenting, hardly reassures that all is under control. I mean, what about my "incurable" lung cancer? We're not treating it anymore. Is it going to now grow and reassert itself and if it does, will we then stop the thyroid cancer treatment? It seems that there could be a return to sender situation here where I'll be back and forth between oncology and endocrinology. I'll figure it out. I'm not afraid to ask the tough questions. It's the answers that might scare me though.

Kenny Lourie is an Advertising Representative for The Potomac Almanac & The Connection Newspapers.

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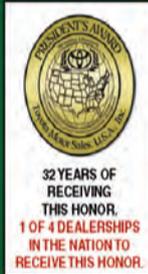
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