

Pegasus fans riding high

By Betty Francis

Special To The Desert Sun

"Show your donors where the money goes" is one of the most important, yet difficult, duties for a charity or nonprofit.

But when donors see the homeless puppy going home with a kind family, or a first-in-the-family student clutching his graduation diploma, or wide-eyed third graders watching their first live theater performance, purse strings fly open!

CASE IN POINT: The Pegasus Riding Academy for the Handicapped's "Rider Awards Luncheon" held annually in December at the Renaissance Esmeralda Resort in Indian Wells.

Unlike some Pegasus events, which are held at a polo club or in an elegant restaurant, this one is for the riders and their families — some of the most physically and mentally disabled residents of the valley.

Currently, Pegasus has 191 children and adults attending weekly for therapy.

Many of them use crutches, walkers, wheelchairs, or other mobility devices to get around. Yet stories of their successes when hoisted onto the



Retired U.S. Air Force Major General Ken Miles with four Marines from the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in Twentynine Palms, who volunteer as side-walkers at Pegasus. LORETTA VLACH/SPECIAL TO THE DESERT SUN

PEGASUS RIDING ACADEMY FOR THE HANDICAPPED

MISSION: Pegasus Riding Academy for the Handicapped, in Palm Desert, has grown from a "one horse operation" to an internationally recognized leader in the field of Equine Therapy. It partners with seven organizations and 11 schools to provide equine therapy to 191 riders (at a cost of \$800 each, per season) at no charge to the recipients. Tickets to the annual awards luncheon are \$80.

INFORMATION: (760) 772-3057 or by email to info@pegasusridingacademy.org

backs of gentle, patient, trained therapy horses, are astounding.

The horses are all adopted and given a new life at Pegasus. The riders set goals for themselves each season — such as "holding my head up for 60 seconds," or "sitting up straight, without help, for five minutes."

But one day a year, these riders are the stars of the show! And their

proud, beaming smiles are proof that they know it.

The entire family of each rider is invited to this event, resulting in an overflow crowd of 643 this year, with most of the families hosted at no-cost by Pegasus donors.

The public figures who leap to volunteer for this event every year include host-empcee **Kris Long** of CBS Local 2, and a pre-

event concert by the Buddy Rogers Youth Symphony under the direction of **Harry Nugent-Patten**.

Retired U.S. Air Force Major General **Ken Miles** and wife, **Karen**, attended Marines from the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in Twentynine Palms, who volunteer weekly as side-walkers at Pegasus. Their transportation costs are now covered by Pegasus supporter, **James Houston**.

Other underwriters for this event were **Ardath Albee**, **Katherine J. Andrews Foundation**, **Jerome Angel**, **the Auen Foundation**, **Richard James**, **David Kornell**, **James R. Houston**, **Wendy Lewis**, **Eileen Mason**, **Harold Matzner**, **Rhonda** and **Ray Smith**.



President Lori Sarner presents the "Pegasus Family of the Year" award Mr. and Mrs. Jack Haemmerlin, and their daughter, Robin Haemmerlin. LORETTA VLACH/SPECIAL TO THE DESERT SUN

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

An event of this magnitude would not be possible without dozens of people whose names are seldom mentioned, among them: **Chase Berke**, **Karen Renberg**, **Penny Carpenter**, **Richard James**, **Carl K. Osborne**, **Elaine and Larry Patton**, **Dick Shalhoub**, **Peter Solomon**, **Tim Vail DVM**, **Christy Arban**, **Geoff Binney**, **Larry Patton**, **Pete Peterson**, **Leanna Bonamici**, **Lisa Brady**, **Alicia Gomez**, **Charlie Paglia**, **Rene Perla**, **Kathleen and Michael Potts**, **Judy Schrader**, **Kathy Hart**, The Nurses of

This year's chairs were **Chase Berke** and **Karen Renberg**, along with auction chair and PR coordinator **Albeth Paris Grass**. Key Pegasus staffers included Executive Director **Robin Montgomery**, ranch manager

Kaiser Hospital, the NCL Ticktockers, **Linda Norman Thomas**, **Molli Hayes Pillsbury**, **Yermolai Simmons**, **Michael Harlow**, and **Ellie Weiner**, whose amazing high-school honor students contributed at least a hundred miles of "running" throughout this event.

Additional thanks to Prime Time Growers who donated the beautiful flower décor in memory of Chuck Hodges and other businesses with a heart such as CBS Local 2, the Spanish language channel, Telemundo 15, The Estate Jewelry Collection, Saddleback Inn, and Trio restaurant.

Virginia Davis, and SRC coordinator **Sheri Radley**.

The Pegasus "Family of the Year" award was presented by president, **Lori Sarner** to Mr. and Mrs. **Jack Haemmerlin**, parents of Pegasus rider **Robin Haemmerlin**.