

Therapy is good horse sense

Pegasus. A white, winged, divine horse. In Greek mythology, an emblem of inspiration, a worker of miracles.

How very fitting that the Pegasus Riding Academy For The Handicapped bears his name. The academy also inspires and knows how to work a miracle or two.

It starts with rescuing and rehabilitating horses, then training them to give disabled children a horse-back ride that provides a therapeutic, full-body, range-of-motion exercise.

Pegasus has more than 190 disabled children and adults taking advantage of its horse-back therapy.

Pegasus pays to bus



John Annarino

special needs classes from all three unified school districts in the Coachella Valley.

Other riders come from the Stroke Recovery Center, Angel View Crippled Children's Foundation, Desert Arc, United Cerebral Palsy and the Autism Foundation.

Doctors from Loma Linda and Shriners hospitals regularly refer patients to Pega-

sus because of the benefits of its low-impact therapy.

And what does this beneficial horseback therapy cost the parents of the children? Not a cent. Pegasus pays for it all.

"We only look at the ability of the child, not the disability," said Pegasus founder and president Lori Sarner. "After riding at Pegasus, the children not only make physical progress, they gain a sense of accomplishment."

Meeting the team

It was my pleasure to attend Pegasus' 18th annual holiday luncheon. The Buddy Rogers Youth Symphony

made beautiful music, and a spirited silent auction raised funds for Pegasus, one of the oldest charities in the Valley.

The highlight of the luncheon was the presentation of awards to its "stars," the Pegasus riders. Accompanied by proud parents, the riders took to the stage to accept their rider award. And a beaming young woman in a wheelchair held high her "Rider Of The Year" award.

The festivities also honored the Pegasus teachers, volunteers and benefactors who make it all possible.

Horses and ponies take the riders on 30-minute lessons Wednesday through Saturday.

If you'd like to visit the riding academy or if you're interested in volunteering, please contact Karen Renberg, VP/Volunteer Coordinator at (760) 413-5054 or Albeth Paris Grass at (760) 778-8023.

You can help, too

When you visit or volunteer, you'll see the children abandon their crutches, walkers and wheelchairs. You'll see them be hoisted onto the backs of the gentle, therapy horses.

And you'll see them set off on a horseback ride with a smile on their face that says, "I can do this."

Thanks to Pegasus, indeed they can.

Peegasus column touches readers

My column last Friday was devoted to the Pegasus Riding Academy for the Handicapped. A great many readers responded, pleased to know that such a wonderful program as Pegasus exists. Here are some of the comments.

» "Because of your Pegasus column I went online and made a monetary donation. I also asked about volunteering for this great cause."

» "I found the Pegasus story inspiring as well as informative. They certainly deserve all the attention you can give them."

» "I love stories like this. With all the troubled times we've been facing, it's nice to know about the wonderful work that the people at Pegasus are do-



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ing."

» "A tear jerker. Very moving. I actually cried."

» "Thank you for making the simple task of sitting on a horse meaningful and poignant."

» "It's been my great pleasure to act as a volunteer at Pegasus. I hope your column brings us more volunteers. I guarantee they'll enjoy being a part of this as much as I do."

Last week's column

mentioned that at Pegasus' holiday luncheon a woman in a wheelchair held high her "Rider of the Year" award. The woman's name is Robin Haemmerlin. Pegasus told me an interesting story about Robin.

"Robin came to Pegasus with muscular dystrophy. But that didn't stop her from being hoisted onto the back of one of our gentle horses. And with every ride around the arena, she gained a sense of balance and strength and independence. Robin has loved every moment of her Pegasus experience because it has provided her with a cherished constant in her life — her weekly horseback ride."

You can view the children and the therapy

horses at the riding academy or online.

The Pegasus website is: www.pegasusridingacademy.org

If you're interested in volunteering, contact Karen Renberg, vice president/volunteer coordinator, at (760) 413-5054 or Albeth Paris Grass at (760) 778-8023.

Pegasus is now raising funds for a much needed roof for the riding arena. To make a tax deductible contribution, please mail your donation to: Pegasus Riding Academy For The Handicapped, 34-450 Pegasus Court, Palm Desert, CA 92211.

Pegasus. Simply by focusing on the ability of the child, not the disability, it continues to work its miracles.