

Pegasus, Truly A High Flyer  
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This past weekend I attended the "Rider's Awards" luncheon, an annual December event of Pegasus Riding Academy, the Coachella Valley based non profit which uses equine therapy to enrich the lives of its physically and mentally challenged clients. I have been an active supporter of Pegasus for a number of years and I serve as a member of its Board of Directors. The Pegasus mission is to assist any and all challenged members of our community using both four legged and two legged volunteers. The clients range from 5 year old and severely challenged, both physically and mentally, to senior stroke victims who are trying to regain physical balance and normalcy in their lives.

Pegasus relies on the good will of the volunteer community and the generosity of donors. Pegasus is always financially challenged and much of its effort is directed towards fund raising in order to continue its services as demand far outweighs the number of human volunteers and horses available. There are not words enough to describe the effort put forth by the volunteers who, so selflessly, do everything from lifting the rider on to the horse to leading the horse and rider to mucking out the stalls and making sure the basic needs of all clients are taken care of.

At this year's annual Riders Awards luncheon there were 660 people in attendance, of which some 400 were riders and their families. The event was held in the ballroom of one of the larger local hotels and everything was perfect, from the food to the appearance of Santa who thrilled all of us but who mostly thrilled the younger children who very seldom have much to smile about.

Most of the Pegasus clients come from low to moderate income families. Not only is it a day to day financial struggle for these families but just the every day caring for a special needs child or adult puts an added burden on moms, dads, brothers and sisters. For the Rider's Awards Luncheon, Pegasus picks up the entire cost for all clients and their families. For many of these families, this day is the highlight of their year.

As a Pegasus Board Member I, and other Board members, have the pleasure of standing on stage and placing the Rider Award Medal around the neck of each rider. Riders on crutches, in wheel chairs pushed by family members and those who walked with uncertainty crossed the stage while family members and Pegasus volunteers took photos of each. I know that each award recipient, in his or her own way, took great pride in the moment and felt a sense of joy and accomplishment, so often missing in their lives. were, for at least a few moments, able to feel a sense of fulfillment and reward for their efforts.

As for me, the payback was more than I deserved. As I placed the award medallion around the neck of each special needs participant, I was filled with a wonderful sense of fulfillment and love for each of these special people. Some I kissed and some kissed me back. Others bump fisted me, as they often do at the Pegasus Ranch with the volunteers and others, not capable of kissing or bump fisting, just looked at me with an understanding that I knew to be love.

I often think about the problems and difficulties facing our country and I fear for the America we love and cherish. But then I picture the faces of the Pegasus Riders and of all the Pegasus volunteers and financial supporters and I realize there is so much more to America than what happens in Washington or Sacramento or even city hall. America, after all is said and done, is still in good hands and great hearts.

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