

# Pegasus: The Miracle Worker

By JOHN ANNARINO



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

So Pegasus Therapeutic Riding is very well named. It certainly inspires as it works miracle after miracle.

The miracle starts with horses that have been rescued from retirement and donated to Pegasus. The horses are then trained to give special needs children and adults a horseback ride that provides a therapeutic, full-body, range-of-motion exercise—an exercise aimed at improving movement of specific joints, muscles, ligaments and tendons, as well as cognitive and emotional stimulation.

Crutches, wheelchairs and walkers are abandoned as riders are gently placed onto the backs of the therapy horses and ponies.

“After equine-assisted riding at Pegasus,” said Pegasus Chief Operations Officer and Program Director Chase Berke, “riders of all ages not only stride to make physical progress, they also feel empowered and gain a sense of accomplishment.”

Pegasus has 225 special needs children and adults taking advantage of its horse therapy. And Pegasus pays to bus the children from all three unified school districts in the Coachella Valley. Other riders come from the Angel View Crippled Children’s Foundation, Desert Arc, United Cerebral Palsy, ACT for MS and Autism Foundation. Doctors from Loma Linda as well as private doctors and therapists refer patients to Pegasus because of the benefits of its low-impact therapy.

“We look at the ability of the person not the disability,” said Board member and hands on volunteer Penny Carpenter.

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

It was my pleasure to attend Pegasus’ 24th Annual Riders Award Luncheon. The highlight of the fund-raising, holiday luncheon was the presentation of medals to its “stars”, the

Pegasus riders. Accompanied by parents, the riders took to the stage to proudly accept their medal. A beaming young woman, Fiona Shoemaker, held high her “Rider of the Year” award. The Pegasus Family of the Year award was presented to the Kontaxis Family, proud parents of rider Nicolas Kontaxis. The festivities also honored the Pegasus teachers, volunteers, benefactors and Board of Directors who make it all possible.

“We have a constant need for volunteers,” said Berke.

“It takes three volunteers for each special needs rider: two side walkers and a horse leader. We also need funds to keep improving our riding facility. A roof over our riding ring is something we especially would like to see.”

If you’re interested in volunteering, please call Volunteer Coordinator Kevin Marshall at 760-772-3057 or Penny Carpenter (SCPD resident, Board Member and volunteer) at 760-574-0548. No experience is needed.

Pegasus, a Non-Profit 501(c)(3) organization not funded by state or federal funds, relies solely on donations and grants. To make a tax-deductible contribution, please mail your donation to:

Pegasus Therapeutic Riding,  
34-450 B Pegasus Court,  
Palm Desert, CA 92211.

You can view riders Wednesday through Saturday from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., October through May, at Pegasus in Palm Desert. Or you can visit the Pegasus Therapeutic Riding’s website: <https://pegasus-ridingacademy.org>. Pegasus also has a Facebook page.

“Please come see what we do,” said Berke. “You’ll see children and adults with disabilities set off on a horseback ride that gives them a sense of balance, strength and, most importantly, independence.

You’ll also see a smile on their face that says, “I can do this.”

Thanks to Pegasus, the miracle worker, indeed they can.



*“We look at the ability in the person not the disability.”*

