



Heaven's Gait Ranch

Therapeutic Riding Center

Winter 2017 Newsletter

Dear Family and Friends,

It is hard to believe it has been six months since many of you first visited Heaven's Gait Ranch! We are pleased to inform you that our winter program is currently in session, and because we could not have done this without all your prayers and support, we thought you might enjoy reading a little more about our journey thus far.

Construction:

Thanks to many of your generous gifts, the weeks that followed our wedding included a lot of insulating and drywalling, priming and painting, cutting and staining, moving and rearranging, as well as purchasing and planning for our therapeutic riding program. We had a blast completing the final touches of the office build out, and we learned a ton about working together in the process. We also realized the horses are pretty therapeutic for us as well.



This fall Bruce McClaren, Jim McLaughlin, and Steve Miller donated countless hours of their time and expertise, mentoring us through the necessary plans to prepare the farm for winter. Before the ground froze, Jim and Brian dug a trench in the paddock (6 ft deep by 100 ft long) to install a winterized, automatic water pump for the horses. After hours in clay and what seemed like a lifetime's worth of mosquito bites, they finally called it a day at Hobo's Kitchen Corner. Thankfully, this waterer hooks up to our well on site, which means the horses have access to fresh water 24/7, we aren't filling buckets 4X a day, and we are decreasing operating costs from the big barn.

After installing the waterer in the paddock, we got electricity, plumbing, and heat up and running in the office and reception area. The temperature in the barn with the stalls is set to a toasty 40 degrees, and although the arena is not heated, we have only cancelled one class so far due to inclement weather. While Brian stayed busy overseeing the structural improvements to the indoor arena, he also built the ADA ramp and mounting block so that our riders with wheelchairs can mount our gentle giants with support on both sides. Thanks to Brian, Heaven's Gait Ranch is now officially up to commercial coding, and visitors are constantly raving about how nice the barn looks.

Programming:



While the men enjoyed putting their tools to work, I was busy with the ladies building the programming, caring for the horses, and coordinating volunteers behind the scenes. In August we had three horses, and now we're up to five, with two more just starting their trial periods.

Ember is our 11 year old Rocky Mountain gelding from Wisconsin Rapids. He was the first horse to come to HGR last summer, and he was purchased with the help of Howard and Judy Edison. Jack is our 19 year old Quarter Horse from Mukwonago, WI. In his younger years, he was mostly used for reining competitions, and he was donated to HGR by Jackie Vana. Mac is our 16 year old Paint gelding from Wonewoc, WI. After living on 100 acres in Wonewoc, WI, Mac arrived to HGR in September with the help of Jim Zirngibl & Susan Wilson, David Zirngibl & Laura Witt, and Mark Zirngibl & Nicole D'Astice. Denali, aka "Levi," is a 14 year old little Morgan gelding who arrived to HGR in October. We free lease him while his owner Samantha Vian is away at college. Simpson is our 15 year old happy Appaloosa gelding from Amberg, WI. Simpson also arrived at HGR in October, and he was purchased with the help of Andy & Lisa Munao. Lastly, our two horses who have just started their trial period are Ellie and Tommy. They are both Tennessee Walkers who are 22 and 21 years old respectively. Their owners, Cheri & Gene Eberhardy, have pledged to donate them to our program.



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Programming Continued...

Thankfully this fall we were blessed to find Lynn Pfundtner, a Certified Equine Tellington Touch Practitioner, out of Belgium, WI to help us with our training needs. Lynn has been coming to HGR 2-3 days a week to properly prepare our horses for our therapeutic riding program. We also hired Micah Keshemberg, a Registered Therapeutic Riding Instructor with the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship. She came to us from Cedarburg, WI, and she is now the lead instructor and equine manager who lives on site at HGR.



On Veterans Day we invited the community to an Open House event at the farm which was a huge success (thanks to my mother's epic sloppy joes and delicious brownies). Fifteen volunteers assisted in serving about 65 people who came from the surrounding communities, all of whom were eager to tour the facility, meet the horses, and learn about our therapeutic riding program. We officially served our first rider, Mark P. Zirngibl (my father), the day after Thanksgiving. Brian was the lead walker, and my two brothers David and Mark were side walkers.



Since the first of the new year, we joined forces with Dr. Peg Houglum, a wonderful, local physical therapist, who has graciously donated her time and talents in helping us onboard more riders into our program. She helps us screen the riders' medical history and physician statements with our evaluation team, and she also conducts a mobility test that helps us determine which horse and how many side walkers would be appropriate for each individual rider.

Because of our team approach, we are now serving individuals with spina bifida, speech and hearing impairments, trigonocephaly, sciatica, PTSD, and Down Syndrome. We have trained and worked with over fifty volunteers who have selflessly offered hours and hours of service in support of our mission, and we cannot wait until spring when more will join our efforts in the sun.

Upcoming Events

- Our first local fundraiser will be held Saturday, March 18, 2017 from 2:00-5:30 pm at the Lake Church Pub & Grill, located just off Highway 43 at 690 County Road D, Belgium, WI 53004. The Lake Church Pub & Grill will be hosting a Meat Raffle on our behalf, and tickets are only \$1.00 each. We will also have a silent auction during this time, so if any of you are itching to get up to WI, please join us on Saturday, March 18th!
- Get those work boots out, boys, and join us this spring for a day of fencing fun! Because our herd has grown, we need to fence in another paddock so that our program horses have some more room to graze and run. Dates are TBD (as the ground thaws), but contact us at 920-400-0628 if you're interested in coming up for spring cleaning and building at the farm. We'll have a BBQ and grill out to follow (we promise we'll make it worth your trip).

In closing, we want to thank you again for all your prayers and support this past year. We hope all is well with you and your family, and we hope to see you again soon at Heaven's Gait Ranch!

Love Always,

Margaret Mary McClaren

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