

Horse Power: How riding heals

New center in Eagle offers therapeutic riding lessons

By AMY NIXON
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The stars must have aligned for Liz Partridge, Anjie Kokan, Wendy Konichek and Linda Konichek to all be in the same place at the same time. For whatever reason, these women, who all share a love for horses, were at the right place at the right time – and their friendship gave birth to the Horse Power Healing Center in Eagle, which strives to provide individuals who are physically, mentally or emotionally challenged with healing empowerment through horses.

"I don't see people as having disabilities, but abilities."

Liz Partridge
Therapeutic riding instructor

Kokan, of Palmyra, and Linda Konichek, of Eagle, developed a friendship through a poetry group. When Kokan learned that Linda's daughter, Wendy, was moving back to the family ranch, Jericho Creek Farms, to help establish a riding academy, she mentioned she had always wanted her son, Brindley, who has severe autism and limited speech, to try therapeutic riding lessons. Kokan introduced Linda to Brindley's in-home therapist, Liz Partridge.

Partridge was a horse trainer before a car accident that left her with a spinal cord injury. Since the accident, she was certified as a therapeutic riding instructor and co-founded Avalon Therapeutic Equestrian Center in Ixonia. She later worked in Madison at Integrated Development Services, where she provided in-home therapy for children on the autism spectrum.

The women got together, and, with Brindley as their

test case, have formed the center, in which Partridge serves as therapeutic riding instructor, Wendy serves as founder and directs the equine portion of the program, Linda acts as founder and chairwoman and Jodi Olenksi serves as executive director/treasurer.

Partridge explained that her accident has given her a unique perspective in helping people work through their fear of horses to help build self-esteem.

"I have a lot of sensory and mobile issues," she explained. "It's why I got into therapeutic riding. I don't see people as having disabilities, but abilities. People may have challenges, but those challenges make them want to work even harder, and I've seen some amazing things through therapeutic riding."

Wendy, who has worked with horses since she was young, also has experience working with people with special needs. She has worked at Lutheran Social Services and has experience working with young people.

"Her gift is making people who are afraid of horses feel very calm and safe," said her mother, Linda.

Both Wendy and Partridge have worked with Brindley, who has made vast improvements since beginning his lessons last fall. Kokan explained that Brindley has always enjoyed horses and was thrilled when she noticed that working with the horse Chaheetah had taught her son a lot about responsibility, helped increase his confidence and even improved his speech.

Kokan said Brindley's speech has always been limited, but since he's started riding, he has begun initiating conversation with aides at school and on the bus. He used to be afraid of animals, but now feels comfortable around the farm dogs and cats and



CAROL SPAETH-BAUER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

HOLDING THE REINS – Therapist Liz Partridge instructs Brindley Martin, 10, on holding the reins during a session at Horse Power Healing Center Inc. at Jericho Creek Farm II. Jaimi Grund (left) and Robert Kokan offer support for Martin while riding.



CAROL SPAETH-BAUER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

PALS – Brindley Martin, 10, enjoys a moment with his stepdad, Robert Kokan, after a equine assisted therapy session at Horse Power Healing Center Inc. at Jericho Creek Farm II.

has learned to take responsibility by brushing Chaheetah and preparing his snacks, she explained.

In a narrative written by Kokan, she describes how therapeutic riding has helped her son.

"I am very inspired by our experience, and the few things that have been gained so far are only a glimpse on what is yet to come," she wrote. "This experience has been an

added blessing in our journey through the world of autism, the world Brindley now rides through on the 'white horse' that will be teaching him many things. If you ever thought about giving horses a try for any child, I encourage you to do so. The animals God has created for us have the ability to touch hearts and enhance lives."

The Horse Power Healing Center, S101 W34628

Highway 10, held an open house May 22. The center will offer small group and individual private therapeutic horseback riding lessons as well as equine learning for nonriders. It serves people diagnosed with disabilities and challenges such as multiple sclerosis, stroke, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, traumatic brain injuries, cancer, depression and the autism spectrum.

According to Linda, equine assisted therapy improves coordination, balance and flexibility, cognitive abilities, enhances communication, improves self awareness and instills a sense of self achievement.

Lessons are organized by type of disability and age, explained Partridge. Group lessons are limited to two or three riders to allow more one-on-one time with students. The equine learning program offered for non-riders includes grooming, horse handling, horse knowledge and other unmounted activities.

For more information, visit www.horsepowerhealingcenter.com or call (262) 751-6525 or (262) 594-3667.