

Horse play

Equus XII, a fall fund-raiser in Gladstone, will boost therapeutic riding center

In an effort to provide an even higher level of care to its riders, Somerset Hills Handicapped Riding Center is making plans for its annual event with all the elegance of a society ball.

Equus XII will take place on Sept. 13, for the second time at the United States Equestrian Team Olympic Training Facility in Gladstone.

A silent and live auction of more than 150 items — including getaway travel packages, fine art, jewelry and sports memorabilia — will highlight the occasion.

The USET stables will be transformed into a Venetian market during Carnivale, and Equus XII guests are encouraged to attend in costume and don masks for the festivities.

"While riders undoubtedly benefit from the addition of new and improved programs, benefactors do too," said Somerset Hills Handicapped Riding Center's director, Nichola Redmond. After years of experience in nonprofit and fund-raising work, Redmond has learned to draw on a winning formula.

"It's simple," she said. "Anyone who donates to our organization not only gets the obvious spiritual return, but our fund-raising events give them the opportunity to network and increase their visibility, too."

According to Redmond, the overwhelming goodwill from the commitment of her volunteers and benefactors never ceases to amaze her. She believes their generosity is by far the most important thing.

The center's initiatives in land preservation in its beautiful Somerset and Hunterdon Hills location have also paid off, since the setting has been instrumental in drawing several large donations, she said.

Redmond said that approximately 90 percent of the proceeds from Somerset Hills Handicapped Riding



Barbara Migton, 19, left, and her speech therapist, Angela Rodrigues, do a little bonding with "Hat," at the end of Migton's riding session at the Somerset Hills Handicapped Riding Center in Oldwick.

STAFF PHOTOS BY
KATHY JOHNSON

Center's fund-raising events go directly to improving its programs.

In addition, proceeds from Equus XII will allow 30 riders to be added to the program this year from the waiting list.

Somerset Hills Handicapped Riding Center is a nonprofit charitable organization dedicated to improving the lives of physically, emotionally- and cognitively-challenged adults and children through diverse equine assisted activities. The center provides adaptive horseback riding lessons, equine-assisted physical, occupational and speech therapy and an integrated summer day camp (for children with and without disabilities).

In therapeutic riding, clients participate in adaptive horseback riding lessons. Therapists cross-trained in the movement and behavior of the horse use the horse's gaits in treatment sessions, allowing sensory stimulation that cannot be reproduced in traditional clinical settings. Clients also benefit from the emotional bond that grows between horse and rider. The horses accept each individual regardless of their limitations, and the benefits that result from the developing relationship of horse and rider are increased independence, self-esteem and self-confidence.

Somerset Hills Handicapped



Above, volunteers walk 6-year-old Bridget McGrath round the riding ring at the Somerset Hills Handicapped Riding Center.

At left, Speech therapist Angela Rodrigues, right, and student therapist Melanie Feller, left, Bridget, center, get ready for her riding session. Rodrigues provides speech therapy to clients in conjunction with the horseback riding.

For your information

WHAT: Equus XII, a benefit for the Somerset Hills Handicapped Riding Center

WHERE: The United States Equestrian Team Olympic Training Facility, Gladstone

WHEN: Sept. 13; donations for the silent and live auctions are currently being accepted

PHONE: (908) 439-9636

Riding Center currently serves more than 170 riders each year on its 12-acre farm in Oldwick, which was recently expanded to include a large

barn, indoor arena and education room. The facility houses 14 horses and has a core of more than 300 active volunteers. The organization

receives no state or federal funding and relies solely on the generosity of individual supporters to fulfill its mission.