

Special Needs Therapeutic Riders Amaze the Crowds

Imagine a bright, clear Arizona winter day; add to that, special riders clad in outfits rivaling any Olympic Equestrian participant; mix in some wonderful therapeutic riding horses, 50 volunteers, silent auction and 350 excited spectators and you have “***The Winter Classic Equestrian Teams Horse Show***”.

The second annual event was hosted at Horses Help, one of only three “Premiere Accredited Therapeutic Riding Centers” in the State of Arizona. “I never saw so many tears of Joy” commented one of the judges Linda Sanchez. You could feel the sense of accomplishment in each rider as they concentrated on completing their pattern while demonstrating proper riding skills. Their backs were a little straighter, attention to task a little more focused and when they finally displayed their ability to back their horses up successfully, each participant looked to the judges and nodded their finished presentation. With the pressure off the smiles exploded as “big as the State of Texas.”

The equitation event for the participants was completed after several months of training. The competitive riding teams are made up of students in the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA) centers at Horses Help and The Therapy Zone.

A new addition to the competition this year was the first Special Needs driving competition in Arizona. These drivers have been practicing their skills since September. Leslie Paradise and Nina Turley both Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructors started the program at Horses Help this year. The two miniature horses Rebel and Sasha performed beautifully. Rebel the resident celebrity who had just returned from performing in the Rose Bowl Parade with Arizona’s *Petite Elite Miniature Horse Driving Team*, did not look a bit tired as he was directed through his competition by drivers Paige and Nicolas with flawless perfection.

Miss Teen Arizona, Jordyn Enochs accompanied the colors which were driven in by the miniature horse teams.

The “Winter Classic Show” was developed because of special needs equestrians who wanted to continue to develop their individual riding skills.

Gregg Goodman, Executive Director found this need growing and commented, “The idea behind therapeutic riding is to help riders progress toward independence. When they achieved this we would send our riders out to conventional riding centers. When we followed up with their progress, many of our riders had stopped equestrian pursuits because many non-therapeutic riding instructors were not capable of working with special needs clients where knowledge of tack diversity, planning, and a great deal of patience is required to help them achieve their goals. So we decided to expand our programs to help them to the next level. This has been such a rewarding experience for everyone including our community partners.”

The next events, the *Spring Roundup*, will be held in late spring and will host riders competing in a timed obstacle course event. In addition the Community *Ride A Thon* is scheduled for February, come join us for a beautiful Trail ride!

Other collaborative partners in the event were The Phoenix Jaycee Comancheros who manned the grills and presented a \$4,000.00 check from their annual Pony Express event. The Scottsdale Charro's presented a check for \$10,000 as they prepare to raise additional dollars at their annual "First Pitch Event" held at West World on February 3rd.

Anyone interested in supporting these events, or receiving a newsletter should contact the center for more information. Gregg.G@horseshelp.org. Phone # 602-569-6056.

Photos by Tara Mogan



Competitive Rider Struts their Stuff



Riders Show off their Ribbons



Miss Teen Arizona Jordyn Enochs is escorted into the arena by Nina Turley and Sasha