

Groundwork



Managing the Horses Help barn is no cinch. It takes experience, organization and lots of hard work to make sure our horses benefit our riders. We thought you might enjoy learning a little about the inner workings of our HH barn. So, in each issue of the Barn Blog, we'll corral Barn Manager Lisa Péwé long enough to ask her how it all comes together around here.

Lisa, how do you choose a suitable horse for our purposes here?

That's a good question because we just don't accept every horse that's offered to us. When evaluating a horse for therapeutic use, I look at a whole range of qualities. First and foremost is attitude. We need a horse that likes people and likes to "please" and is self confident. Self confident is not to be confused with "willful" or an "independent thinker." These are horses that really want to do their own thing. They aren't a good fit for therapeutic riding. What I love to see is horses with a "babysitter attitude." These horses are very willing to take direction from their leader or rider but at the same time they take a sort of personal responsibility for the safety of their riders. Many horses at Horses Help have the babysitter attitude. Two that come to mind at the moment are Andy and Matt.

You can say that all of our horses are hand-picked for attitude first – then they must also meet criteria for soundness, size, and age. Age is an important factor. We don't mind having seniors but we need horses that can give us some longevity. Yet we don't want a horse that's too young as their life experience is very important.

Why is "life experience" important in a horse?

Well, look at it in terms of kids vs. adults. When you're little, you pretty much think only of yourself – your needs, your wants. But, when you get older, you begin to think of others and what they might need from you. It's the same with a horse. We need horses that have been through enough life experiences that being a therapy horse is actually a privilege at their stage of life, not boring or a chore.

What else do you look for?

I have learned since being here that a horse's way of moving is important for therapeutic riding. Some have a smooth, flowing gait, some have a more vertical "choppy" gait and others have kind of a lateral swinging gait. The different types of movement help in different ways for different riders. I usually won't exclude a horse just on their gait but we need horses with a variety of gaits and, if we already have several with the same kind, then it would be helpful to find others with different types. I also get feedback from the instructors because, even if the horse meets all of my criteria, they still have to be the ones who are comfortable using that horse.

How did you learn to look for these qualities?

I grew up showing and being around all aspects of horses. I became a

professional horsewoman shortly after I was married to a professional horseman. During that time I was privileged to work with a number of excellent trainers and horsemen -- people who really understood the thinking and behavior of horses and how to assess attitude. It is important to judge a horse based on what you want them to do and to be able to see that potential or ability even if they don't look like it at the moment you are evaluating them.

What other "life experience" do you have that helps you manage the barn effectively?

While working as a horse professional I had the opportunity to co-own and/or manage a variety of equine businesses and activities. Some of these included Arabian horses auctions, an Arabian breeding and training farm, and a western entertainment company providing desert trail rides and hay rides.

However, I would have to say that the life experience that has prepared me most for this job and that has been closest to my heart is teaching kids and adults the joys of riding and communicating well with their horses, and teaching horses to understand and perform their best for their riders. It's building the team of horse and rider that I really love. I did this most during the years that I had Del Camino Equestrian Academy in Scottsdale. The academy was a riding school that I started with my husband in the late '80s and sold in the late '90s. It started out when I was giving my daughter lessons. Other people in the barn wanted me to give their children lessons too and also help them with their horses. After that, it just snowballed and in about a year and a half I was overseeing 150 lessons a week taught by myself and five full-time instructors that I had hand-picked and trained in our particular method. After a while, I only had time to teach and coach the "show team" as I was often traveling with them to regional and national competitions.

And what did you do in your spare time?

Besides raising my daughter and two sons? Well, there really wasn't any spare time. We did, however, take some of the students and our kids, of course, to a place in the mountains and have a summer horse camp each year. After we sold the Academy and stopped training and coaching professionally, we bought a ranch in northern New Mexico and opened it up to guests that wanted to come and learn more about horses.

How did you come to our barn?

Years ago, about the time that I had started giving lessons, Cindy Ramsey, the founder of Horses Help, came to my husband and me and wanted some space at the farm to run a therapeutic riding program. We were pleased to do this and to help her and her partner get started by loaning her horses and helping to raise funds for her organization. Since then we have remained friends and loaned horses to the program and such. For the last several years I had not been doing anything with horses, and, in fact, I didn't think I ever would do anything with horses again. Then, last June, Gregg Goodman, the director of HH called and ask if I would be interested in talking with him and, I guess you would say, the rest is history.

Did you have any experience working with developmentally disabled kids before coming here?

When I was in high school, I worked a little with the mentally disabled

students. However, when I went back to school in 2004 to get my B.S. in Psychology, I was very interested in various mental and emotional disabilities and most of my research was concentrated in these areas. I have also had some first-hand experience with children who have special abilities.

So you think being HH barn manager is a good fit for you?

I love seeing these kids and adults realize their full potential. I used to have a mission statement at the academy: "Teaching life skills through the medium of the horse." I can't think of a better way to do that than bringing them both together in a therapeutic setting.