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Horse-riding therapy aids health, improve confidence

by Diane Dempsey Deel | The Fenton Press
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DAVISBURG -- Linda and Tom Watson provide therapeutic horse-riding services, including riding instruction for the hearing impaired, at Pretty Pony Pastures near Davisburg, Michigan. The couple at Pretty Pony Pastures work with adults and children with autism, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy and other neurological disorders to help them gain strength and improve their confidence. They have about 30 people taking therapeutic horse-riding instruction.

But all of their horses are boarded at a neighboring farm, making it time-consuming to bring horses back for therapeutic riding services. "We made the decision to build a barn," Linda Watson said. "We spent the kids' inheritance, and they understand. We still need to do the fencing and stalls."

They have adopted a Not-so Xtreme Farm Makeover, asking for volunteer laborers to help build a fence, put stalls in a new barn being constructed and provide plumbing and electrical work. They are also accepting monetary gifts, not donations. They also will provide advertising on [Pretty Pony Pastures Web site](#) for businesses contributing to the cause.

Therapeutic riding helps people with a variety of disorders, Linda Watson said.

"The movement of the horse closely mimics walking as the horse moves its right side first, then its left side," she said. "It triggers memory cells in a person's legs."

The therapy also improves muscle control, balance and sensory perception, she said. One boy with Down syndrome came to the farm the first time barely being able to stand. However, she said she saw a significant improvement in a short amount of time.

"Within four weeks, his walking has improved, and he was walking almost unassisted," she said. "He's been using side-walkers that have their hand on his leg, so that he doesn't topple."

Kathy Carter of Highland sought therapeutic horse-riding instruction after suffering a stroke and cardiac arrest four years ago. She went through months of physical, speech and occupational therapy. She later was told to try therapeutic horse riding, also known as hippotherapy.

Carter said Pretty Pony Pastures has helped her regain the life she had before her illness.

"They helped me tremendously with my problems with balance, visual and memory," Carter said. "They are wonderful people who do a great service for the community."



Photo from Linda Watson for The Fenton PressKatheryn Eyman of Waterford signs to Kailey VanStelandt, 9, of Holly, who is taking horse-riding instruction at Pretty Pony Pastures for the hearing impaired. The horse, Constella, is a Haflinger.

What: [Pretty Pony Pastures](#), which provides therapeutic horse-riding services.

Where: 9160 Eagle Road, Davisburg
Information: (248) 634-7276; [Linda Watson](#)