

Volume 2, Issue 3

March 2011



BECOMING YOUR BEST

Stories Of Hope And Encouragement About Individuals With Disabilities

Becoming Your Best Newsletter

Greetings,

We are entering the time of year when nature is waking up. We observe evidence of this by way of new growth everywhere we look. There is a plethora of colors to behold. A fragrance of new blooms fills the air.

Spring is a time of change—of growth, renewal, and the birth of both plant and animal life. It is a season of the year that reminds many of hope. Changing from the gloominess and bleakness of winter into the hope of a bright and cheerful new season.

Someone once said, "If nothing ever changed, there would be no butterflies." Of course, not all change is going to result in something as beautiful as a butterfly. But it is an awesome thing to behold when change and growth result in a positive outcome that can be observed by all!

This month our newsletter is about a Special Education teacher with a lifelong love of horses who has developed a program that brings growth and change in the lives of individuals with disabilities. The positive outcomes can be seen by parents and teachers, but more importantly by the individuals themselves.

I trust you will enjoy this month's Becoming Your Best newsletter!

Submit your inspirational stories to the following e-mail address:

stories@becomingyourbest.com.

Subscribe to our FREE newsletter by sending an e-mail to:

newsletter@becomingyourbest.com.

The photograph is by Bob Sumners—see more at www.shootthebeach.com.

[WE ARE NOW ON FACEBOOK—BECOME A FAN.](#)

Mission:

We are dedicated to presenting inspiring stories of hope and encouragement about individuals with disabilities.

These stories of success are meant to provide support and the keys to "Becoming Your Best!"

Thank you for your stories and your support!

George M. Graham Jr.

"HORSEBACK RIDING BENEFITS INDIVIDUALS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS"

George M. Graham Jr.

Meeting All Needs with Equines & Teaching All Individuals Life Lessons (MANE & TAILL) Therapeutic Horsemanship Academy was founded by Samantha (Sam) Iulo about two years ago. MANE & TAILL provides children and adults with special needs in Dare, Currituck, and the surrounding counties of Eastern N.C., the opportunity to learn horsemanship and horseback riding in a safe, nurturing environment.

Sam has been teaching Special Education with Dare County Schools for over 5 years. She works with special needs students in a multi-handicapped classroom at First Flight High School in Kill Devil Hills, N.C.

Sam also has over thirty years of experience in horsemanship. She is a member of the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA) and has completed all of the expectations required to be a NARHA certified therapeutic riding instructor. She is also certified as a Special Olympics Equestrian Coach.

Sam grew up in North Jersey and was very involved with the horse programs in the local 4-H. She volunteered at a therapeutic horseback riding facility that was run by one of the original members of NARHA. She has always had animals, including horses, in her life. She currently has 3 dogs, an alligator, a snapping turtle, and a pony. Sam also has two preschool age boys that keep her on my toes.



MANE AND TAILL Therapeutic Horsemanship Academy Director and Instructor, Samantha Iulo.



Sam with her two boys—Tyde and Carver.

Sam finds working with children and people with special needs extremely rewarding and feels blessed to be able to work in this field. She said, "This program is a way of sharing a life long love of horses with the people I have learned so much from."

Each rider is matched with a horse and equipment that best suits his/her individual needs. Attainable goals are set for each participant. Horseback riding skills and horsemanship are taught in a fun way that includes games and time to explore all the horse has to offer.

Sam shares, "The participants love playing catch with the volunteers from horseback. They also play around the world, where they ride sideways and backwards, as well as forward. All participants have their individual time to work with their volunteers and NARHA certified instructor."

Sam relates the inspiration for the therapeutic horsemanship and horseback riding program came from one young man and one horse.

"The young man found a joy and peace in horses that was hard for him to find in the world. The horse had a kind nature and compassion that gave him the ability to take care of any beginner," Sam said.

Find out more information about MANE & TAILL by going to their website at <http://maneandtaill.org/>

"HORSEBACK RIDING BENEFITS INDIVIDUALS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS"... CONTINUED.

The young man always loved horses and needed them in his life. When he arrived in a new community, his need for horses was still there. This need was being filled by a Speech and Language Pathologists (SLP) who took him to a farm for his speech sessions. After the SLP no longer worked with him, the young man had difficulty communicating he still needed the horses.

One day he started crying. When asked why, he wrote the SLP's name on the board and drew a horse. Fortunately, one of his teachers began taking him to the horse farm in exchange for good behavior. He always earned his monthly trip to go to the horse farm and enjoyed filling the water troughs and collecting feed buckets at the farm.

The following year, the teacher wanted to continue taking this young man and wanted the rest of her class of special needs students to experience it as well. When the class went to the horse farm, it was evident these students needed to be around horses and have the opportunity to ride.

The horse, Midnight, was immediately game for helping these young people learn horsemanship and horseback riding. These young people began learning social skills and confidence immediately from him. It only took a few visits to see this needed to be offered to every person in the community with a special need. Red, Charlie, Cowboy, Minnie Pearl, and recently Pone Pone all joined Midnight to play a part in being equine friends to the young and old with special needs.



Sam shares about one young man, "Brian would brush and lead a horse, but was afraid to get on the back of him. Eventually, Cowboy (the horse) took him for a slow and careful ride. Brian was not afraid after that. Now he waves at the camera when he goes by."

"When Dani began riding, she needed the support of two strong people to help her balance, and she was unable to go for more than one lap around the area. Today she balances herself and doesn't want to get off the horse," said Sam.

Sam goes on to share, "Families, caretakers, and teachers are amazed at the calm a child feels after riding, the confidence they gain, and the conversation they are offering from the experience."

"Another young lady with very limited use of one arm and limited verbal ability, as well as no use of her legs, rides a horse proudly at a walk. And goes to a trot for a taste of real freedom," Sam added.

"Mary uses a wheelchair for mobility and only has the use of her right arm. She rode a horse with enough balance to wave at the camera with her strong arm," Sam says proudly.



CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR WINNERS!

Lindy Coleman and Jennifer Boyer were randomly selected from our new subscribers and have won a copy of the 2011 Becoming Your Best calendar.

Emily Summey and Debbie Sewell had the highest number of referrals to subscribe to our newsletter. They have won a copy of the 2011 Becoming Your Best calendar.

Congratulations to our winners and thanks to everyone for their support of the project!

"HORSEBACK RIDING BENEFITS INDIVIDUALS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS"... CONTINUED.

Many parents and teachers can be heard commenting:

"The horses and riding give my daughter something to talk about with her peers."

"His father and I were so proud to see him independently steer the horse at his first horse show."

"My daughter wants to be a horseback rider now."

"She was smiling the whole time she rode."

"I have never seen her so calm."



Sam concludes by saying, "All the participants have one thing in common. They all look forward to the next time they will go out to the horse farm. The benefits these amazing animals offer are endless. The participants are having so much fun; they do not even realize they are learning and growing from the experience."

MANE & TAILL is a non-profit organization offering programs and lessons on weekends and in the summer.



MIDNIGHT

Midnight is a 19 year old walking horse known for his compassion and gentle nature that makes him very safe for even the most timid participant. Midnight is MANE & TAILL's very first therapy horse, and the riding program was able to start a thanks to him.

RED

Red is a 20 year old thoroughbred who is known for his ability to carry the most unbalanced riders safely and SLOWLY!



MINNIE PEARL

Minnie Pearl is the newest member of the team and is very sweet and kind. Although she is still young and learning, she has a huge heart that is reflected in the heart shaped marking on her neck. She is a 7 year old paint mare.



For more stories like this, visit our website at <http://www.becomingyourbest.com/>.

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