

Sebastian Riding Associates

Quarterly Newsletter



www.sebastianriding.org

Summer 2018

Remembering Our Beloved Thunder

by Jeffrey Lesitsky

Thank you Thunder. You have changed the world for so many.

On June 5th, 2018, the world at Sebastian Riding Associates changed forever. Our noble steed, Thunder, completed his journey on this earth and has started a new one running in the clouds. I would like to share with you some of the story of Thunder's amazing journey at Sebastian Riding Associates.

Thunder, the golden Palomino, started with Sebastian Riding Associates in 1995 when he arrived as a scared 8-year-old gelding. He settled in and he learned that being a therapy horse was fun. He had to get used to a lot of new things that he never saw or heard before, but as he matured, he then took these things in stride. One thing Thunder learned quickly is that when he had a lesson, some students brought carrots and mints and he loved them. He knew his students were small and had little fingers or might be a little scared of such a big horse, but he took those treats ever so gently. He had a great sense of what his students were thinking.

He was a smart guy, too. If a student was nervous, off balance, or just scared, he would change his gait and posture to make sure his student would have the best lesson ever. This isn't to say he didn't have a wild side either. When his adopted dad would get on, he would have to hold Thunder back and say, "Whoa Thunder, take it easy, there will be time to run and jump." We did, after proper warm up for both of us, of course!!

He was also a jokester. He loved to throw his halter on the ground and wait for you to pick it up. He also knew if you left a wheelbarrow next to the stall: it would magically tip over and he would just give you this innocent look.

As the years went by, Thunder matured more and more and became the "go-to" horse for evaluations, new students, and even for new volunteers to learn equine behavior. He would never pin an ear to any person. He also learned how to ask for some food if he was doing some back to back lessons by gently nibbling on the leader's hand with his lips asking for a carrot or two to help carry him through the next lesson before dinner. Such a gentleman.

Thunder was a very trusting soul. If he was unsure of something, he would look at the leader and he would "ask" if it was OK. If the leader said, it is ok, he would trust them completely and move on forward.

He was also a good teacher to other horses. If we were on the trail and the horse in front didn't want to go through the puddle, he would just come around, go through the puddle to show the other horse that it was OK. He also liked to be in front.

When Thunder needed help from us, the Sebastian team was glad to help. Over the years he had some minor health issues such as a tummy ache, an injured foot, a bump on his head, or he just didn't feel well. We made sure he got top notch care and he always bounced back. In July of 2014, Thunder was having a serious medical emergency of Colic. We were in his stall and we knew this was serious. He looked at me with those big brown eyes and was telling me that he needed help. The team got him to the hospital and he had to have surgery to resolve this issue. He made it through his surgery with flying colors and he was so resilient that he got to come home a day early. What a trooper!! He was back to his old self in no time and was so excited when I took him into the arena and just practiced taking him into the mounting block. He wanted to get back to his students and what he loved.

Thunder was also a camera ham. He loved having his picture taken and would stick out his tongue in some of the pictures. He was featured in many SRA videos, but went coast to coast when he was featured in a SmartPak video. His SmartPak video has been viewed by over 10,000 people.

As Thunder got older, he had some breathing problems in the heat and humidity, but medication was able to keep it under control. He never let it keep him from what he loved, having fun with his students. In early June, his breathing got worse and the Vet came out. They gave him some medicine, but it wasn't working, so he had to go to the hospital for an ultrasound. He was a great patient, but what the Vet told us was life changing. They found he had lymphoma (cancer) and it was in his lungs. He couldn't breathe very well and there was no cure. I couldn't even fathom that he would not get well. Thunder didn't give me the look of "Help me" this time. He knew it was time for his journey here to end and move on to the next one. He was sad he had to go, but he knew he had to.

The word got out and Thunder came home from the Vet to find a lot of his fans surrounding him, giving him hugs and kisses. They stayed late into the evening and came back in the morning. Thunder knew it was time to move on as he stared out his window, just looking at the sky for over 4 hours that night. He could see something that we couldn't. I slept next to his stall to make sure he was comfortable. Kellen slept in the lounge and Victoria slept in her car. We didn't get a lot of sleep. Later that morning, Thunder was led out to his field and he was gently laid to rest in a field of buttercups, surrounded by love. Thunder had 31+ years here on earth. Many tears were shed as he laid down to rest. After he was gone, I looked down at him and I noticed a single tear coming from his eye. He was sad to go, but he knew that it was his time. He knew he was loved by all of his fans.

Thank you Thunder, you have changed so many lives for the better. We are so glad we were a part of your life as we are glad you were a part of ours. You are a once in a lifetime horse, best friend and confidant. Godspeed Thunder. I will never forget you. We may be separated now, but I know one day, we will be back together. I love you. Your adopted dad. 🐾



Montgomery County Special Olympics

by Kellen Kissingner

Every year when spring rolls around, we know it's time to start preparing for the Special Olympics Qualifying show! We are fortunate enough to have almost thirty hardworking athletes who compete for the chance to represent Montgomery County (and SRA) at the Special Olympics State Games at Penn State University. These athletes spend months practicing dressage, trail courses, and equitation, and give their all.

It always amazes me to see the work that our athletes put into their riding. They work together with their horses and instructors to be their best, and it's very evident when the show rolls around that they love what they do! It was my first year being a part of the planning of the show, and it was awesome to see how much work goes into it from all sides! I got to know more of the students with whom I hadn't had the opportunity to work, and I saw students I know progress from previous years. Special thanks to our judge, Caitlin Fahey, for her hard work, and to all the volunteers who made this show possible. To anyone who has not had the opportunity to attend our SO show in April, mark your calendars for next year! It is a great time. 🐾



First person:

Special Olympics at Penn State

by Megan Mullock

When I first found out I was going to Penn State for the horseback competition, I was super excited. I wanted to tell everyone about the news. This was my third time going. I needed extra lessons for the show. I took the bus up to Penn State. It was four hours long but we watched two movies. We watched Pitch Perfect 3 and Daddy's Home 2. We were allowed to eat on the bus. It was a very nice ride.

When we arrived at Penn State, we were given dorm rooms and there were two to a room. Then I got to see my horse Gunner, he was a beauty. We made such a wonderful team. I brought home 2nd and 5th place ribbons and the gold. I believed I tried my best! The coaches were just amazing.

Some fun things we did were walk to get ice cream and we walked through Olympic Village and got popcorn. We had a dance and met some football players and got my picture taken with them. It was an amazing time. It was a great experience, I would recommend this to everyone.



Guess Who I Am!

I was born in North Dakota, and I just recently celebrated my 20th birthday. I am double registered with the American Quarter Horse Assoc and the American Paint Horse Assoc. My registered name is **Dun Double Tuff**. (The answer is hidden — can you name me and find the answer)?

Meet the Volunteer Greta Longenecker {in her own words}

When I retired in 2016 from working in my profession as a funeral director after 37 years, I Googled "volunteer jobs 19454" and Sebastian Riding Associates came up on the list. I was familiar with Sebastian and had an embroidered patch of the logo hanging on a cork board with some of my other treasures... I must have received it at a horse show long ago....

I learned to ride at age 8, rode off and on until age 15 when a beautiful $\frac{3}{4}$ bred Thoroughbred/Morgan mare came into my life and we showed and hunted for over 20 years. After Brown Sugar died at age 28, I rode neighbors' horses to keep them exercised.

I love being at SRA because I love being around the horses, and have been given the privilege and pleasure of working with Trixie, a Haflinger mare — cute and smart! I also enjoy the company of the volunteers and staff, and the students are amazing! There's always plenty to do and lots going on. Even so, it's always an occasion for mindfulness as the horses and students keep us in the moment.

When I'm not at SRA, I'm usually in the company of my dog, Flash. We used to go on long walks together, but he's 17 now and those days are behind him. I still love walks in nature on foot or horseback, looking for wildflowers and birds, gardening, kayaking, playing pool, and being with my friends and family.



"Let's Meet Under the Awnings!"

by Chris Hanebury

Every year I send out a map of the Thorncroft show grounds to the students and volunteers that are attending. The map has a red "X" where we park the trailers and set up our awnings. That "X" marks the rendezvous point, the resting place, the snack tables, and the welcoming committee!

I remember the first time I went to the Therapeutic Riding Division (TRD) of the Devon Horse Show at Thorncroft; it was overwhelming! Five arenas running consecutively with over a hundred horses and riders from 4 states. I remember leading a horse and rider team as we tried to negotiate our way through the arrows, numbers, and colors that are supposed to help you find your way through the obstacle course. I also remember that one of the judges complimented Sebastian on the professional and well trained volunteers that we had helping us.

16 years later and I still marvel that our students can come to this strange busy place and show off their riding and horsemanship skills with confidence! It is an accomplishment to just find the rendezvous point! We have such a strong team of riders, staff, volunteers and horses that you wouldn't notice at first glance any horseshow nerves at all.

When a rider's class is getting close, everyone helps the rider put on their jacket and number and helmet. Everyone helps get the horse saddled and bridled. And everyone troops off to the correct show ring to watch and cheer each other on! The day is filled with camaraderie, friendship, and support.

If you haven't come out to watch the TRD show, you should do it. If you think your rider might be interested in showing there one year, talk to your instructor! Instructors can have a student placed on the revolving list of competitors, and when the rider's name comes around, it is their time to shine!

All of the eight riders are returning TRD riders and four horses competed this year. Of the horses, Galen, Shey, and Gunner were experienced and Trixie was the novice first-timer on the equine crew. All the riders and horses performed beautifully and have much to be proud of. Samantha Weitz and Trixie won the MacDermott Trophy, awarded to the rider with the highest combined score in Division II, and thus qualified to show at Devon on Sunday. See her article below! 🐾

**Congratulations to all,
and see you next year
under the awnings!**



New Faces at SRA

Becky Fritz started her journey with horses here at Sebastian Riding Associates as a young teenage volunteer in the early 1990s. She went on to earn a Bachelor's Degree in Animal Science from Penn State in 1999, where she competed with the Penn State IHSA Equestrian Team. She primarily rides hunt seat over fences, but is equally at home exploring the equine trails of Evansburg State Park. Before returning to us in April 2018, Becky served as a teaching artist in an after school program in downtown Norristown, as well as a riding instructor to able-bodied riders at a local ranch beginning in July 2016. Over the years, Becky often remembered how much she loved SRA and waited for the day when the time would be right to return to us. Currently, Becky is pursuing her Registered Therapeutic Instructor Certification through PATH International. Becky spends her free time with her husband of 18 years, her two teenage daughters, their horses Trace and Dancer, their Akita dog, Dee Dee, and her daughters' guinea pigs and rabbit. She feels that joining the SRA team has been like going back home again.



First person: My Devon Horse Show Experience

by Samantha Weitz

I went to the therapeutic riding division of the Devon Horse Show hosted by Thorncroft Equestrian Center on May 25, 2018. It was a lovely day to stay outside all day and ride. I got to ride Trixie, a horse that was not a show horse and new to horse shows. She was an Amish plow horse from Ohio. Trixie was a very good girl at the show and did everything that I asked her to do. I got 1st place in my equitation class and 3rd place in Dressage and Trail. I went home very happy with my rides and my ribbons.

Later on that evening I got a phone call from my instructor, Jenny, telling me that I came in first in the division and won the McDermott Memorial trophy. I was invited to the Dixon Oval at the Devon Horse Show to get my award and to compete with the other division champs for Grand Champion of show status.

We went to the Devon showgrounds on Sunday.

It was raining and muddy but it cleared up just as we got there. Riding Trixie in the Dixon Oval was very exciting. We got to warm up with all the other horses and Trixie just took it all in. She looked around at everything and was very good, she seemed to like all the excitement. We rode first to receive the trophy and ribbon. We then competed with the other winners from Thorncroft in the championship class. Trixie and I did very well, we did not win, but there is always next year! I received the McDermott Trophy for getting the highest score in my division, so you can imagine how happy I was that day. My name will be engraved on the trophy along with the prior award winners. Trixie went from an Amish plow horse to a show horse in one weekend! It was a great experience.

I want to thank the SRA instructors and volunteers for all of their hard work to make this possible for the riders to compete at this show. 🐾



Raise the Roof Update!

SRA's **Raise the Roof campaign** is closing in on the \$90,000 milestone and we are moving forward with scheduling the excavation work. This is so exciting and wouldn't be possible without the help and support of our families, staff, volunteers, and the community. SRA recently received a \$10,000 grant for the Raise the Roof project from the St. Andrews Lutheran Church in Audubon. Our sincere thanks go to Dene Mitchell, our grant writer, board member, volunteer, and Riding Free Founder, and to the Church grant-making committee, for helping make this dream a reality. We still have some work to do, so if you or someone you know is interested in hosting a fundraiser or making a donation, we would greatly appreciate your help.

Yoga and Horses!

Yoga and Horses is a new program offered in collaboration with Yoga Home in Conshohocken. Once a month, up to six participants from the community, some with yoga background, some with equine background, and some with neither, come to the farm for an experience in self-awareness. They participate in a yoga session on the lawn at SRA and then transfer to a horse's back to apply the principles of breathing and stretching and witnessing how it affects both the rider and the horse's movement and attitude. Sessions fill up quickly, so contact the office to schedule your spot!

Guess Who I Am! Answer
Did you guess that I'm **TORY**?!

Register today

for the **13th Annual Legs for Lindsey 5K and Fun Run/Walk** on **August 8th!**

The race will begin and end at the property of corporate partner **SEI Investments**, with the race route along the Perkiomen Trail.

Visit www.runtheday.org

The Vinnie Chronicles

by Kellen Kissinger

When we last saw our small friend, he was Christmas caroling and being interviewed! After a well-deserved winter break, he got back to work with a few visits to adult enrichment programs. He, along with his entourage, went to Meadowood Senior Living in Worcester in February, and in April he made two stops in one day! First was the Expanding Horizons program hosted by the Lutheran Community of Telford, and from there we were off to the Souderton Mennonite Home. At each of these stops, we presented the "World of Equine Assisted Learning and Therapy" to older adult learners who enjoyed hearing about what we do at SRA. They thought that Vinnie was the greatest and loved getting to meet him and love on him!

Next on the docket was a trip just down the road to Skippack for Skippack Days in May. Vinnie met lots of families and made many friends who had never seen a miniature horse before! And finally, at the end of May, Vinnie had a very special trip as part of the Collegeville Memorial Day parade! He took his friend Sebastian with him and they were both decked out in their best red, white, and blue ensembles. They were a big hit in the parade and left with many new admirers. Stay tuned to hear more about Vinnie's upcoming adventures!

Sebastian Riding Associates, Inc. • 3589 Water Street Road • Collegeville, PA 19426 • (610) 489-3741

Did you know...

Instructor, **Ruth Swartz**, submitted and was successful in securing a grant from the **Louis T. Savino III Foundation Memorial Fund** for the purchase of an AED (Automatic External Defibrillator). Thank you, Ruth, and the Foundation, for this gift of life – hopefully we will never have to use it!

SRA hosted volunteer work outings this spring for **SEI Investments**, **DeLage Landen (DLL)**, and **Indian Valley Middle School**. This is a great way to engage the community in our program and to get some of the projects done that we never seem to have the manpower to complete. A huge thank you to **Frank Viall** for overseeing and working alongside these groups!

Thank you to everyone who participated in the **Spring Bulb & Flower sale** this spring, organized by **Jessica Buck**. There were lots of blooming gardens this spring and SRA raised \$750, a win-win for sure. Thank you, Jess!

This spring, SRA hosted **Inglewood Elementary English Learners class**, part of the **North Penn School District**, at the farm for our **Intro to Horses program**. This is a program offered to groups as an introduction to horses without riding. For this group, it provided lots of great vocabulary and a fabulous interactive classroom!

Thank you to everyone who came out for a great meal at **Olce Pizza** on May 23rd as a fundraiser for the **Montgomery County Special Olympics program**. Olce donated \$250 in support of the Special Olympics program at SRA.

2018 Derby, Dine & Dance

by Kendra Cleland Bonner

Sebastian Riding Associates hosted our **8th annual Derby, Dine and Dance** on May 5, 2018, at **The Club at Shannondell**. This event continues to be our largest annual fundraising event. All ladies and gentleman wore their Kentucky Derby hats and attire, and everyone celebrated the work we do here at SRA. We started the evening with hors d'oeuvres, watched the **"Run for the Roses"** live, and then welcomed the **Where's Pete Band** to the stage for live music and dancing. The debut of our **"Superhero"** camp video was shared with all. Watching the video of students being the super heroes we see in them every day at camp was a moment to be remembered. Our largest-attended Derby, Dine & Dance included many silent auction and raffle items. The silent auction and raffles are the largest piece to this fundraising event. Big items at this year's event included Malcolm Jenkins and Carson Wentz signed jerseys, original artwork, a variety of gift baskets, lots of wine, and Preakness, Eagles, and Phillies tickets. Thank you to all who donated by collecting and creating items for this event. Thank you to all of you who joined us and participated in the auction and raffles. All of you who helped make this event successful are truly Sebastian Riding Associates' super heroes. **We could not do it without you!** Watch for details about next year's Derby, Dine and Dance!

