

Sebastian Riding Associates

Quarterly Newsletter



www.sebastianriding.org

Summer 2019

Special O County Show

by Kellen Kissinger, Special Olympics Head Coach

Spring was a busy time as always on the farm, with one of the most exciting events being the **April Special Olympics County Qualifier**! This show is always anticipated by many, and this year was especially exciting. Thanks to the generosity of **Montgomery County Special Olympics**, we were able to increase the size of our team and share this wonderful opportunity with more of our community. The team this year reached a record high of over 40 equestrian athletes! Each and every one of these athletes spent their lessons working hard and learning the elements of their competition. On April 13, our athletes gathered to show off their skills in either trail or dressage classes in an

attempt to earn a spot on the 2019 SOPA Summer Games team. With the combination of our hardworking athletes, horses, staff, and volunteers, it was bound to be a superb day. **Thanks go to our wonderful returning judge, Caitlin Fahey**, who had her hands full judging so many great rides. In the end, the names of all the blue ribbon winners went into the hat and six names were drawn. **The 2019 Montgomery County Special Olympics equestrian team included Jill Novak, Alon Colzie, Jadynn MacNamara, Stephanie Wojton, Shannon Byrne, and Meredith Tyson.** Many congratulations to everyone who participated. We are proud to see SRA represented so well! 🐾

First Person: My Special Olympics Experience

Hi, my name is **Shannon**, and I want to tell you about my experience with Special Olympics State Games for horseback riding. I started riding when I was 5 years old and in my first horse show I got 1st place. I was very proud of myself. The reason I got into horseback riding and Special Olympics is because I always loved horses and I knew if I tried it I would like it.

The first time I went to Penn State for Special Olympics, I was 11 or 12 years old and I was nervous; it was the first time away from my parents but thankfully they came the next day to see me ride. It was so much fun and when I left my mom asked me if I wanted to do it again and I said maybe. I have been back to Penn State three times. Now I'm 21 years old and I went to Penn State this year. I did good and I had a lot of fun. Instead of having one roommate, I had two roommates, and they were very nice. The reason why I like Special Olympics is because I always like the events that I do, I always like meeting new people outside of my stable, and other coaches. Another reason why I like Special Olympics is at the dance they have Penn State football players meet the athletes and they can take pictures and sign autographs for you. I'm so glad that I made that decision to ride horses and participate in horseback riding in Special Olympics. I really hope that I can go again. 🐾



Raise the

ROOF!

A Community Celebration!

by Dené Mitchell, MPH (Part-time Director of Program Sustainability)

It took a spark, a grand idea, 2-1/2 years of directing a capital campaign, and most importantly, the SRA community, to realize our dream of constructing a second outdoor riding arena. To celebrate this amazing accomplishment, SRA hosted "Raise the Roof: A Community Celebration" in March, which included a ribbon-cutting ceremony; reflections by Christine Hanebury, Frank Viall, and Dené Mitchell; and refreshments.

In the midst of a wet spring and nearly 2 weeks of solid rain, the skies opened and the sun shone brightly on the day of the event. Fortunate to have this warm, sunny day, many students and their families came out to celebrate with us. In addition, the Perkiomen Valley Chamber of Commerce attended and supplied a festive red ribbon and scissors. **The honor of cutting the ribbon was given to Nancy Bonenberger, who represented our most generous funder of the project, the Genuardi Family Foundation.**

The message of the day was centered on honoring the many people who helped "Raise the Roof," and who make the SRA community so special. Like the many parts of an orchestra playing together in harmony towards a perfect symphony, SRA's diverse community of students, families, founders, staff, volunteers, generous grantors, and especially our equine friends, work together towards a common mission to make lives better for those with special needs. No matter what your contribution, be it large or small; or be it your precious time, energy, monetary donations, grant awards, or any other creative ways to support SRA, you are a valued part of our community. You are a piece of the puzzle — you make SRA complete and we thank you!

Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for the New Arena

by Tina Grubelic

On a warm and sunny Saturday afternoon, SRA hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony to open their new arena. Lots of parents, students, volunteers, and instructors showed up to show their support for the event and the program. Fun was had by all with refreshments and Vinny the dwarf miniature horse greeting everyone. Both the Perkiomen Valley Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Montgomery County were in attendance, as well as a representative from the Genuardi Family Foundation, the largest donor to the program. Families were in attendance as well to document the event with photographs. SRA Executive Director Chris Hanebury was the first to speak, welcoming everyone to the event and saying a little bit about the background of SRA, the reason for the new arena, as well as why the event was taking place today.

Board member and Riding Free program developer Dené Mitchell talked about community. She explained how the word community means a thousand pictures can say one word because it is a combination of everything, not just a place or person. SRA is fortunate to have a large community, including students, parents, volunteers, and employees. The new outdoor arena itself, as well as the event, would not have been possible if it weren't for the amazing community at SRA.

The ceremonial cutting of the ribbon at the beginning of the event was very symbolic of the new growth of the program. The event was the culmination of a campaign that started 2 years ago. Through the fundraising process, there were some doubts that it would happen but with the help of foundations, business sponsors, generous donors, as well as many kind donations from individuals within the SRA family, the dream became a reality. The main reason for the arena is, as Chris Hanebury said: "We needed additional space for the program to accommodate the growing interest."

The dedication of staff members Executive Director Chris Hanebury, Program Manager Jenny Dec, Assistant Program Director Kellen Kissinger, and last but not least, President of the Board of Directors, Frank Viall, has made SRA what it is today, a peaceful learning environment where students can connect and heal through equine-assisted therapy.

Meet the Volunteer

Liz Moyer

{in her own words}

I was happily introduced to SRA about a year ago through a colleague whom I now have the pleasure of calling a friend. Whitney has been volunteering at SRA for over 5 years and is the co-chair of the SEI Cares committee. She planned a volunteer day and after that first day, I was hooked. That first day was full of time with Shey (Momma), team work, laughter, and decorating for the student show.

I grew up horseback riding at a barn in the area but stopped after college. I've always loved horses and the SRA horses are the best of the best. Anyone who has spent time with me knows I love Kasey ("King Kasey") and Sebastian ("snuggle butt"). I will get Sebastian to be a snuggler even if it takes years! However, I can be found giving kisses, treats, and nicknames to all the horses. If I listed all of my favorites, every SRA horse and Gracie would be listed.

The list of things that keep me coming back is too long to share but the highlights are the amazing students who teach me something new every day and remind me to take a breath, be happy, and enjoy the moment. The instructors inspire and encourage everyone — students, parents, and volunteers alike. They take everything in stride and teach us all how to adapt to any situation with a smile. The volunteers are like a second family. We team up and together can achieve anything.

When I'm not a SRA, you can find me at work in financial services, then spending time with family and friends. I like to try new things and just learned how to paddle board and kayak. While I'm not very good, it's fun and that's what matters. Thank you, SRA, for all you do!



New Faces at SRA * New Faces at SRA * New Faces at SRA

We are excited to add **Meghan Lemli** to our amazing instructional staff. Her background lends itself well to our pursuit to grow our mental health program offerings. Look for more on this in the future, but read on to learn more about Meghan:

"I am excited for my education, experiences, and so many of my interests to converge here at Sebastian. I am certified as an Equine Specialist through EAGALA (Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association), and I hold a Master's of Education in Moderate Special Needs. I have extensive experience assisting and teaching individuals with severe and moderate disabilities, as well as at-risk youth. I studied religion and psychology as an undergrad and spent a semester living as a monk in Japan as part of a Buddhist Studies program. I have several years of experience teaching horsemanship and riding to people of all ages in recreational and therapeutic

settings, as well as facilitating equine-assisted therapy and learning for clients dealing with mental illness, trauma, addiction, and emotional and behavioral challenges. I believe in the power of horses to inspire and transform our lives. One of my greatest joys in life has been guiding trail rides through Rocky Mountain National Forest with my dog and best friend, Arlo, in the lead."



~and around the barn~

Pocono is a 15.1 hand Quarter Horse cross gelding who was a trail horse at Red Buffalo in his prior life. As a trail horse, he was exposed to many things and is very laid back. He has quickly become a favorite of students and staff!



Star Performer, aka **Star**, is a 15 hand Morgan horse gelding on lease to SRA while his owner is attending nursing school. He is an inquisitive, happy-go-lucky guy who loves people and his pasture mate, Pocono. Star has shown at the Devon Horse Show and has lots of exposure despite his young age.



9th Annual

Derby, Dine & Dance

by Kendra Bonner

Thank you to all who participated in and donated to our **9th annual Derby, Dine and Dance** on May 4, 2019, at a new location, **The Empress Room**, with **Paravati Catering**. 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 event continues to be our largest fundraising event and this year we welcomed our largest-attended event. With 200 ladies and gentlemen wearing their Kentucky Derby hats and attire, everyone celebrated the work we do here at Sebastian Riding Associates. This year's Derby, Dine & Dance included many silent auction and raffle items. Some of the big items at this year's event included a Carson Wentz signed helmet, Zach Ertz signed "Fly Eagles Fly" documentary

book, original artwork, a wide variety of gift baskets, lots of wine, Eagles tickets, and Phillies tickets. **Thank you to all who donated, collected, and created items for this event.** Thank you, too, to all of you who joined us at the event and participated in the auction and raffles.

And don't forget to **SAVE THE DATE!** The next Derby, Dine & Dance will be on May 2, 2020. The committee is starting the process again! If you are interested in donating your time or talents, or items for our auction/raffles, just call the office and let us know, or speak to any of our committee members: Kellen Kissinger, Chris Hanebury, Jenny Dec, Casey Pierce, Wendy Brynan, and Kendra Bonner. **And of course, don't forget to set your calendars for next May 2, and plan to party with us!** 🐾



Tucker is a 14 hand Palomino draft cross gelding from the Bloomsburg area. His prior life included lots of trail riding and kids riding him bareback. Because he had little lesson experience, Tucker went to a trainer to learn about being a lesson horse so he would be a contributor to the program as soon as possible.



Did you know...

Every year, students, volunteers, and instructors look forward to attending the **Therapeutic Rider Division (TRD)** of the **Devon Horse Show**. The Devon Horse show has been an icon in the horse community since 1896. It is the largest and oldest outdoor horse show in the country and certainly exciting for all equestrians who get to participate. The TRD is hosted by Thorncroft Equestrian Center in Malvern and SRA has participated in the show for many years, and May 2019 was no exception. An SRA team of many including 8 riders and 4 horses participated in Trail, Dressage, and Equitation classes and did themselves and the team proud. This is a huge event and wouldn't be possible without the planning by team leader, **Jenny Dec**, nor without the amazing and tireless efforts of the volunteers and instructors. Participation in the show is determined by nomination by the instructor of students who demonstrate commitment and interest. It is a revolving list and all the participants are added to the bottom of the list and everyone waits with anticipation until their name gets to the top of the list! After the show, the names go back on to the bottom of list, giving everyone interested an opportunity. Such a fun day, even **Lakota** thought so!



At the
Devon
Horse
Show!



The Thrivent team at SRA!

THANK YOU, GENUARDI FAMILY FOUNDATION!

Longtime supporters of SRA **David and Maribeth Genuardi**, along with **Executive Director Marisa Ferst**, visited SRA in June. We showed them our new arena and had some photo time with Vinnie. SRA was also presented with a \$25,000 check, which is only the first of a 3-year/3-part award totaling \$75,000. **Thank you, GFF, for this generous monetary commitment to our organization!** As we continue to grow, donations like this allow us to meet the community's needs, while maintaining high equine therapy standards for our clients.

Over the past 5 years, SRA has received nearly \$25,000 in donations through the amazing support of Thrivent members. The Thrivent Action team was recently at the farm helping with construction of posts along the sensory trail for book boards being painted by volunteer, **Judi Riley**. We are so grateful for the support of Thrivent and its members as well as Judi for sharing her amazing talents with us!

SRA has once again received the **Great Nonprofits 2019 Top-Rated award!** Greatnonprofits.org is the "one and only people's choice award where volunteers, donors, and people served by nonprofits are asked to share stories of inspiration, express their appreciation, and potentially help nonprofits earn a spot on the prestigious GreatNonprofits Top-Rated Nonprofits List" **Thank you to all the families that took the time to share their story and help us earn this award.**

The **AmazonSmile Foundation** allows customers to select a charitable organization to receive donations made by the foundation (not the customer directly) every time an Amazon customer makes a purchase online from Amazon. There is absolutely no cost to customers! Through AmazonSmile, Amazon makes a donation equivalent to 0.5% of the purchase price to the customer's selected charity. **To date, SRA has received \$1,131.36 from customers selecting SRA!** Go to **smile.amazon.com** to learn how your purchases can benefit SRA, too!

We are so excited that all of our horses have wonderful sponsors for 2019 with the exception of two! **Poor Shey and Kasey are looking for their 2019 sponsor** – perhaps you could consider? Sponsorship is \$1,500 annually, and in exchange, you receive 6 lessons (or you can donate them to our scholarship fund), a stall plate so everyone knows you are a sponsor of your favorite horse or pony, a 2020 calendar, **and the affection of a grateful horse or pony!**

The **Spring Bulb and Plant fundraiser** was a **blooming success!** Thank you to everyone who supported the fundraiser, which raised nearly \$500 for the program. Hopefully you are now enjoying these plants. Big thanks to **Jess Buck** for organizing this fundraising event!

Many thanks to everyone who came out to **Olce Pizza** in support the **Montgomery County Special Olympics Equestrian program**. Our thanks to **Kevin, owner of Olce**, for rounding out our donation to \$300! We love Olce Pizza, especially their corn pizza and the fact that they support SRA and the Special Olympics program year after year!

This summer SRA hosted a camp for the children of **Laurel House** funding by the **Hogs & Honeys Foundation**. We were so excited to provide this opportunity for these children, who had no prior interactions with horses. Watch for a future article all about the weeks of 2019 Summer Camp. So much fun!

SRA wants you to Save the Date! Mark your calendars to attend the **SRA Country Line Dancing event on 10/19/19 at the Elks Lodge in Colmar!** Stay tuned for additional details.

Legs for Lindsey

5K FUN RUN & WALK

AUGUST 14, 2019

REGISTER AT
PretzelCitySports.com

