

# Sebastian Riding Associates

Quarterly Newsletter



[www.sebastianriding.org](http://www.sebastianriding.org)

Spring 2021

## 2020–A Year of Resiliency

by Chris Hanebury, Executive Director, SRA

This year certainly has been full of unprecedented challenges for us all on so many levels. For SRA, this included the 3-month closure of the program and subsequent loss of income despite the continuing horse care expenses. Since that time, with the help of the County and the CDC, we developed and implemented a safety protocol to help minimize the risk for our staff, volunteers, and most importantly, our students. As a result, we have been fortunate to adapt our program to allow for the more independent riders to return safely to the sanctuary of the farm. Yet we struggle knowing the remaining students long to return to the warmth and comfort of their equine partners as well. We will continue to look to the County for guidance on when the time is right to invite riders of all abilities to return.

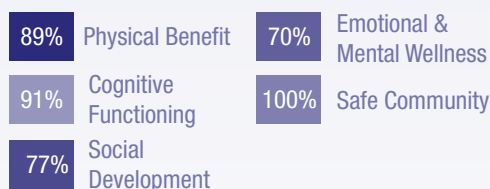
During these times of adversity, we continue to demonstrate our resilience in meeting the needs of a changing world.

We have a new appreciation for the expression, “it takes a village.” Our village includes our employees, who devote their time and energy to ensure their students’ success; our volunteers who despite the risk, commit their time, labor, and love to support us; our donors who believe in our mission and aid us financially; and of course, the team of amazing horses with the unique ability to influence their students in profound ways. With the help of our community, our horses are healthy and happy, half of our students have returned, the lights are on, and our hearts are full of gratitude.

Looking forward, we remain careful yet innovative in adapting programming and fundraising for the uncertain future. More than ever, we are committed to remaining a vibrant community where horse and human interactions improve lives.

### 2020 by the numbers

#### LESSON OBJECTIVE SUCCESS RATE



#### NUMBER OF STUDENTS

2020: 178 2019: 308

63% female

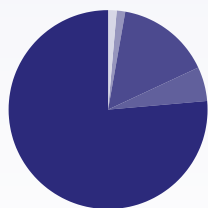
37% male

#### AGE

16% 2-10 26% 19-30 5% 50+  
37% 11-18 16% 31-50

#### LESSON TYPES

77% Therapeutic Riding  
1% Driving  
7% Hippotherapy  
13% Riding Free  
2% Equine Assisted Psychotherapy



#### COMMUNITY OUTREACH

10 Total Vinnie visits  
200 estimated number of participants

#### VOLUNTEER IMPACT 2020 2019

|   |        |        |
|---|--------|--------|
| Total Volunteers                          | 110    | 158    |
| Total Number of Hours                     | 10,060 | 15,086 |
| Number of Volunteers 5+ Hrs/Week Annually | 6      | 10     |

# American Council of the Blind Reaches Out to SRA

by Jenny Dec

Recently, SRA and I had a wonderful opportunity to spread the word about the benefits of therapeutic horsemanship around the world! **The American Council of the Blind** reached out to SRA to participate in an episode of their radio show, "Health Check-Up." That day's feature topic was about developing and maintaining balance for people with blindness and visual impairments.

The American Council of the Blind is a consumer driven and operated nonprofit, meaning they are run by, and for, people with blindness and visual impairments. One of their many programs is their ACB radio station. Their radio uses several different mediums to reach a global audience and has, among many other things, an hour devoted to health-related topics called Health Check-Up.

The radio hosts and I discussed how balance is heavily dependent on information that our brain receives from our vision. Without vision, balance requires a lot more concentrated effort and energy and practice. It was exciting to bring to the table how all of the different aspects of therapeutic riding and horsemanship can help develop and maintain a better proprioceptive sense of where your body is in space. I was able to shine a light on how, from grooming to riding, the horse contributes frequent opportunities to strengthen stabilizing muscles, practice good posture, and receive immediate feedback from a living, breathing animal. Because the radio show is in a zoom meeting format, I was able to field questions from around the country and reach listeners from around the world. It was a great experience!

## Volunteer Appreciation Day: A Blob and a Potluck Dinner

by Meghan Lemli

This past year, quarantine and social distancing have challenged us all to establish and maintain our relationships in all aspects of life. At our **2020 Volunteer Appreciation Day**, we explored and celebrated the many ways we connect here at the farm. We discovered a variety of ways to communicate with and include each other by creating a "Horse-Human Blob." A blob doesn't have a specific shape. It may even be made of many different substances and objects. What makes it a blob is that all its parts are connected. Making use of pool noodles, ropes, cones, and psychic vibes, dozens of humans and a few horses connected to form a colorful, laughing, eye-smiling, Horse-Human Blob! Then we shared a great big potluck dinner, because nothing shows connection and appreciation more than sharing a good meal with good people. The staff, students, and horses at SRA depend on our connections with volunteers. **Thank you all for being part of our beautiful blob!**



## Meet the Volunteer Susan Niskey Popp {in her own words}

In 2016, our last child left home and after so many years of chaos and kids, we found ourselves having the chance to decide how WE wanted to spend our time. I remembered that my daughter had volunteered for a day at SRA for MLK Day and decided to give it a try. After orientation with Cindy and Oreo, I was hooked.

It is now 4 years later, and SRA is not just my volunteer job, it is my second home. I've been so lucky to make great friends at SRA, with the humans and the horses! The horses, students, volunteers, and staff keep me smiling and keep me coming back, even on those freezing winter mornings. Because of my time at SRA, I started taking horseback riding lessons and ultimately adopted a horse named Romeo. In a normal year, we love to travel and have been to 27 countries. And in our free time, we love to be with our kids and two beautiful granddaughters.





# First Person—Andrew's Story

by Andrew Mohn, age 14

I first came to SRA several years ago to watch my sister, Hannah, ride for physical therapy (hippotherapy) and was wondering if I would ever be able to do this? What horse would I ride, and many more questions. Then the time came that I was able to start riding. My instructor was Cyndi and my first horse, Teddy, felt like he was the only horse that I would ever ride. Teddy was beautiful and had a great personality. He was almost always active and it felt like he was always excited to see me when I went. It was like Teddy got me. After what seemed like ages and many fun times with Teddy he started to misbehave and it was decided that he wanted a new job and moved to NY with his new owner. Then came my Neela (AKA Meatball), and I instantly felt like I connected with this horse. She was great, she was young just like me and it seemed as if we had the same personalities. I finally started riding her and she and I were so much alike. We were both stubborn. When I rode her, we walked with purpose, she also loved going on the trail like me. I was so devastated when she left SRA even though I knew it was the best thing for her. She had made such an impact on my life. I started to ride other horses but I couldn't seem to find one that I connected with like Neela. Miss

Cyndi told me that every horse has something to teach us! Along came Zee, he made me work hard to get him to do things that I asked. It was quite a challenge but he taught me that I can do it if I put my mind to it and ask correctly. Right now, I'm riding Trixie and I'm having a great time preparing for contests and shows that we will hopefully get to do this year. Being at SRA and working with all of the horses has given me confidence and allowed me to learn and grow. It is something I love to do. Just to be with the horses has helped me through some tough times. Cyndi has been a great help to me too. She's so easy to talk to, is always so supportive and fun. She and I have a strong bond. Since I started riding, I have experienced the good and the bad. They are not just animals; they all have personalities and it's like they know how you are feeling. Sometimes that's all you need, they understand. Losing them hasn't always been easy but it taught me that sometimes that is what has to happen to keep them happy as well. But, I have learned that there is always a new adventure waiting for me and my horse. I love being a part of the SRA family. I can't imagine not being there and being part of it. My mom calls it a little piece of heaven, and I think I agree.



## New Faces at SRA

~around the barn~

If you take a peek in the field behind the enclosed arena, you'll notice that Tucker has a new friend. Her name is **Sattui**. She is a **13-year-old Gypsy Vanner mare** here on lease from the Tyson family, who purchased her 9 years ago from a farm in Coatesville, PA (the same farm they came from, but they are not related). For the past 9 years, she has lived on a farm in East Greenville and was used as a family horse for lessons for Meredith, an SRA rider, and her mom, Dottie. She was also taken to many local shows since Meredith loves going to shows, and Dottie has done some driving with Sattui, as well as riding.

Sattui stands about 14.2 hands tall. Right now she is wearing a blanket much of the time, so you may not be able to see what she looks like, but she is considered a paint/pinto due to her coloring. She is mostly white with large bay areas and has some black in her tail and mane. She also has those gorgeous feathers, which are almost impossible to keep white! She is a very calm and easy-going horse, and she is used to being led and having people walk beside her, so hopefully she will transition into the program at SRA easily.

~ Dottie Tyson



## Where Is Tory Now?

by Rachel McCauley

You may remember **Tory**, the chunky chestnut gelding with a big white face and four white legs. He was frequently found pinning his ears and scrunching his nostrils, although it was all an act. The old boy never had a mean bone in his body and he loved his job as a therapy horse. Since retiring from SRA almost 2 years ago, Tory has been enjoying the easy life of a vet student's horse. He's living in central Ohio, pastured with three equine buddies, Flash, Echo, and Evers. He has a cozy stall for hot days and cold nights and a ring to trot around in (should I as his owner find the time to ride amidst my busy clinical year). He will occasionally still pop over a small jump or prance out on the trails around the property. Come June, he will be following his human to western Ohio as she takes a job as an emergency veterinarian. Tory has been very happy and healthy and has been the best therapy for his owner through the stress of a demanding professional school program. He will continue to live the happy semi-retired life that his 23-year-old self deserves, full of peppermints and treats.



## 2021 Dutch Mill Bulbs Spring Flower Bulb Sale

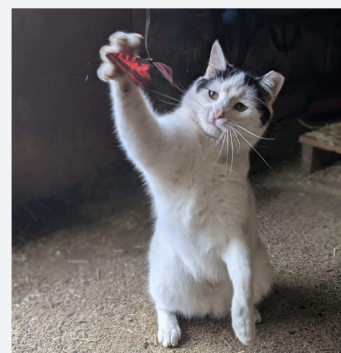
- New this year—all orders placed online and shipped directly to you
- All Dutch Mill bulbs are guaranteed to grow and bloom
- Orders shipped directly to address specified in order. Shipping fees apply
- Order by 6/1/21



For more information and to order, visit

<https://groups.dutchmillbulbs.com/shop/?affiliates=sebastianridingassociates>

SRA welcomes a new friendly feline face to the farm! **Felix** arrived in the new year, a grateful stray looking for new mousing grounds to call home. Felix, a large adult male black & white cat, loves pets, his now-reliable meals, his new feline friend Rudy, and any attention he can get! Felix is settling in and becoming acclimated with his new equine and human friends alike. You'll likely hear a loud meow or purr as he shares his new happiness to call SRA home! He joins Rudy on the farm cat squad and looks forward to greeting you upon your next visit to the farm.



# Did you know...

The instructional staff has once again completed online training to maintain the **Certified Autism Center** designation provided by the **IBCCES (International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards)**. This training was designed for SRA instructors by the **Kinney Center for Autism Research and Education at Saint Joseph's University**. We are so proud of our instructional staff and their commitment to their students' success through ongoing continuing education.

For the past few years, SRA has been one of the recipients of the **Merck, Sharp & Dohme Federal Credit Union Charity Cow Plop**. The event was not held in 2020 due to COVID restrictions and financial uncertainty, but our friends at MSDFCU knew how important this funding is to our program and very generously donated \$2,500 to assist during a time of great need. **Thank you, MSDFCU!!**

## Shout-outs!

Our special thanks to board member **Dene Mitchell** for the amazing job she has done soliciting financial support through grants to help SRA remain a place where horse and human interactions improve the lives of our students. During 2020, we received generous support from **MontcoStrong, St. Andrews Lutheran Church, CCRES, Scholler Foundation, Genuardi Family Foundation, SEI Cares, and Child Development Foundation**. We're so thankful for the financial support and grateful for the community that continues to surround and support SRA in so many ways.

How is it possible that we could have not just one but now *two* Energizer bunnies to help around the farm? As you know, SRA is so fortunate to have **Frank Viall** not only as Board President, but he also does the landscaping, maintenance, handyman work, and anything else needed around the farm to keep it running smoothly. If that isn't lucky enough, he has a brother, Scott, who has also taken to the mower, manure fork, and tools to help maintain the property. We are so fortunate and grateful for this dynamic duo!!!

Our kudos to volunteer **Cindy Diamadi** for the amazing job she does with our newsletter. The newsletter is the perfect tool to help keep the community at large informed on all of the happenings at SRA. Cindy has been adding her personal flair, design, and humor to the newsletter since 2012! Wow, thank you so much, Cindy, we love you!

Our thanks to the **2020 Horse Sponsors!** Sponsorship helps directly with the expenses, such as vet and farrier costs, for each specific horse. In 2020, the annual average cost per horse was \$4,100. The 2020 Sponsors were:

- 🐾 Radar—Frank Viall
- 🐾 Moe—Ronnie Cohen
- 🐾 Pocono—The Fritz Family
- 🐾 Choco—Jerry & Maryanne Clemens
- 🐾 Sebastian—The Baird Family in honor of SRA cofounder, Dr. Eleanora Baird
- 🐾 Vinnie—The Pineda Family
- 🐾 Copper—Mike Beard
- 🐾 Lakota—Desi Collins
- 🐾 Trixie—Donna Wenner
- 🐾 Mardi—Melissa Costell
- 🐾 Tucker—Karen Ziegler
- 🐾 Fozzie—The Lafferty Family
- 🐾 Galen—Shannon Byrne
- 🐾 Lucky—Jeff Lesitsky
- 🐾 Shey—Jude Mantle
- 🐾 Oreo—Frank Viall
- 🐾 Gunner—Ley Shinn
- 🐾 Star—Lyn Harper Mozley

Please contact us if you are interested in sponsoring a horse in 2021!

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# The Vinnie Chronicles

(As told to Meghan Lemli)

As you may recall from the last edition of the newsletter, I visited Shannondell Rehab Center at the end of last summer. It was strange, but lots of fun. The SRA humans and I greeted patients through windows. They were such nice people, I trampled landscaping to touch my nose to their hands through the screens. One nice lady even let me nibble grass from a pot she had on her window sill! Imagine that! Grass in a pot, and I got to eat it!

Well, I liked them so much that when they invited me back to star in a Halloween therapy animal parade, I jumped right on the chance. The humans and I were asked to dress up, so we bandied around ideas - themes that might be fun, things we like, ways to share some of our Sebastian joy...I asked myself, "What would I like to share with them? What brings me joy?" And then it hit me! "Breakfast! Who doesn't love breakfast?" So, Jenny was a sweet, pink, frosted donut. Chris was a yummy stack of pancakes. Kendra was a slice of toast (dry, because I think she may have been on some silly diet or something). Meghan was a sunny-side up egg (I thought the sun might do her some good). And I was the best part-- the bacon! Because, well...you know bacon is the best part of a complete breakfast.

Another therapy animal in the parade noticed me. He was dressed as a lion, and this made me a bit nervous, looking like bacon, but when he introduced himself, I realized he was really a miniature horse, like me, only slightly less adorable.

The parade was long and included lots of dogs, my new lion/horse friend, and a couple of alpacas dressed as a taco and a hot dog. So silly! Alpacas dressed as lunch. Haha....

My fellow therapy animals and I paraded around the buildings and greeted patients, doctors, nurses, and staff through windows and glass doors. We even greeted a few adoring fans in person in the courtyard. My favorite moment was when the patients in the memory unit laughed and cheered for me and my costume. I think I even saw, in our reflections in the glass, a couple of the Sebastian humans tear up a little as the patients smiled and waved. I, personally, will always remember the joy we shared with those wonderful people and animals that day, even the lion/horse.

Editor's note:

Vinnie would also like to add a heartfelt thank you to all of his (our) supporters for your Whinny Wishes donations at Sebastian and Do It Best in Collegeville. A special thank you to Do It Best for their ongoing support of our programs, and to Frank for making sure the tree in the store looked **AMAZING!** These donations help sustain everything we do at SRA, and we can't thank you enough. Vinnie would do it himself, if he wasn't so busy munching on all his gifted hay, grain, and treats. On behalf of Vinnie, the herd, the humans, and the cats, thank you all so very much!

## Reminder for Volunteers

Please remember to log into **SignUp.com** and let us know when you will be here!

