



COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Nov. 6-7, 13, 17, 20

Louise Koch dressage clinic

Info: 310-377-3507

Portuguese Bend Riding Club

Nov. 9

Used tack sale

Info: 310-704-7226

Rolling Hills General Store

Nov. 9-11

Ranch sorting clinic

Info: 310-418-4583

Mantic Farms, Anza, Calif.

Nov. 12, 19, 26

Patrick Spanton jumping clinic

Info: 310-377-3507

Portuguese Bend Riding Club

Nov. 12

RHE City Council meeting

Botanic Gardens Trail crossing on agenda

RHE City Hall

Nov. 21

PVPHA general meeting

Empty Saddle Club

Nov. 22-23

Shawna Karrasch clicker clinic

Info: Email jerseyj2@cox.net or

elizabeth.schoettlin@gmail.com

Ernie Howlett Park

Nov. 25

RHE Equestrian

Committee meeting

RHE City Hall

Events listed here are not necessarily sponsored or endorsed by the Palos Verdes Peninsula Horsemen's Association. To add an event, send the information to pvpha2010@gmail.com.

PVPHA opposes plan for trail crossing

by **MELODY COLBERT**
CORRESPONDING SECRETARY

At the beginning of September, trail users noticed construction next to the Botanic Garden Trail on the north side of the Rolling Hills United Methodist Church.

Upon investigation, we learned that the South Coast Botanic Garden, RHUMC and Rolling Hills Country Day School earlier this year entered into a 20-year agreement to share their parking lots for up to 26 events during the year, allowing pedestrians to walk across the bridle trail to get to each venue. (To see the agreement, visit pvpha.org/announcements.) The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved this plan.

The City of Rolling Hills Estates,



MELODY COLBERT

This gate connects the South Coast Botanic Gardens parking lot with the Botanic Garden Trail.

which was granted an easement years ago by RHUMC for hiking and equestrian use of the trail, was not informed of this plan nor invited to provide any input as to the design or possible impacts on recreational use

See TRAIL CROSSING, Page 6.

NEXT PVPHA GENERAL MEETING: NOV. 21

Learn clicker training in November

by **NICOLE MOORADIAN**
DISPATCH EDITOR

The Palos Verdes Peninsula Horsemen's Association general meeting for November will feature clinician Shawna Karrasch, who specializes in "on-target training." For more information on Karrasch, see the October issue of the Dispatch.

The meeting will be held at the Empty Saddle Club at 7 p.m. Nov. 21.

As a reminder, the Empty Saddle Club requests that meeting attendees leave their dogs at home. U

NEWS BRIEFS

Kathleen Raine cancels dressage clinic

A clinic with two-time Olympian dressage rider Kathleen Raine that was scheduled for Dec. 1 has been canceled due to an unscheduled training opportunity for Raine, according to an email from Pam Schachter of the California Dressage Society's Palos Verdes chapter.

Schachter is aiming to reschedule the clinic for early 2014, weather permitting.

Rolling Hills General Store to host tack sale

The annual fall tack sale on the grass in front of the Rolling Hills General Store is scheduled for Nov. 9. The sale starts at 9 a.m. and goes until about 3 p.m.

The cost to sell items during the sale is \$10 per space, and exhibitors should bring everything they need, including a table, a tent, chairs and any items necessary for displaying their wares. To reserve a space, contact Kelly Yates at 310-704-7226.

The General Store will also hold a sale that day. U

CLASSIFIED

GO ONLINE: Buy/Sell/Lease a Horse; Buy/Sell Tack; Rent/Find a Stall. List your ad (including pictures and unlimited words) FREE at palosverdeshorses.net.

Two-line classified advertisements are free to PVPHA members. To submit a classified advertisement, email it to the editor of the Dispatch at pvpha2010@gmail.com.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Maintaining equestrian lifestyle takes vigilance

by CHARLENE O'NEIL
PRESIDENT

It was called "Clipping in the Dark with Lee Smith" for a few minutes last meeting when the lights went out in the Empty Saddle arena! Her mantra was "take your time." We are always in a hurry to get the job done, and many times it causes temper tantrums on both sides.

We have some local issues that are not going away: The Botanical Garden Trail (see Page 1) and the ongoing drama of Oxbow Development, which wants to build residential senior housing on the Seahorse property. If we are to maintain our equestrian lifestyle on our precious Peninsula, we must be vigilant!

Our next meeting and clinic, scheduled for Nov. 21, will be on clicker training with Shawna Karrasch. Questions? Call Betsy Schoettlin.

We have a saying at our barn, "If you are lucky enough to have a horse, you are lucky enough!"

Happy Trails! U

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Dressage horse tries trail at Dapplegray Ring Fling

by **BETSY SCHOETTLIN**
VP EDUCATION

We went, we bent (poles) and we cowgirdled up!

I almost skipped going to the Dapplegray Ring Fling Play Day & Gymkhana on Oct. 20. Life the week before was complicated and busy and a little disheartening and I hadn't ridden Godivan since Wednesday. My husband and I were battling some challenging plumbing issues and I had decided to stay home and help him with it. Sunday morning came and my husband decided, strangely, that I would be more of a help if I went to the gymkhana. Works for me!

So I saddled Godivan up and headed out. What with not having been ridden since Wednesday and being really super fit, he was feeling very *forward*. I had planned to trot and canter the three miles there to work off some of the excess energy, but it was such a nice morning and so many people were out on the trail that I couldn't without trampling someone, so we mostly walked with a few hopping and snorting intervals.

Godivan is 10 years old and has been my trail buddy and lower level dressage horse since he was four. A few months ago, I went to a Western Dressage show and decided it looked like fun, so I bullied a friend into selling me her extra Western saddle and, voila! He became my new Western horse! He'd only ever been to one show before and had never been to a gymkhana, so when we got to the arena and he saw the 50 or so horses and the kids galloping like maniacs all around, he was fairly wired. The kids all had ribbons and other decorations in their horses' manes and tails. It was quite a zoo.

I expected him to settle down after an hour or so but, nope, he really had his dander up! The dressage world does not generally include much speed or chaos, and the horses galloping past him in the arena and behind us on the trail at breakneck speeds rattled both of us. Thank heavens my ace in the hole—fearless, stick-like-glue rider

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Alyssa Ross—was there! After a few heavy-handed hints, she handed me her horse, hopped on Godivan and galloped him up a trail and a long hill for me. That was just what he needed. Ross brought my horse back huffing and puffing 10 minutes later, and from then on I had a fairly normal Godivan.

I signed up for the pole bending and the trail class. He's never done either of those but it was just for fun so I figured, what the heck?

The pole bending was hysterical. It was not what you would call blisteringly fast, but at least we managed a bit of canter. Godivan couldn't figure out what the heck I was up to. First we'd go left and then right and then left and for that first row of poles, he was pretty solidly confused. On the way back through the poles, though, he sort of started to get it. And on the final gallop—really a nice, medium canter—we actually moved out some. Our time was double the winner's time, but faster than some and I didn't get dumped. And, hey, it was really fun!

The trail class was going to be a challenge. Opening and shutting the gate was fairly easy—we do that all the time. Over a blue tarp—not too bad. Sidepassing over a ground pole threw him for a loop at first; he just couldn't figure out what the heck I wanted. Up until that point, poles were meant to be trotted over. Once it clicked, we just glided over it.

The “polo” obstacle with a broom and ball that had to be swept into the muck bucket was also challenging—he was quite sure the ball was for him! Still, he was a good boy and let me put it where it belonged.

Dismounting and sitting in a chair—piece of cake.

Continued on the next page.

Continued from the previous page.

Mounting from the off side—I also do that all the time as a safety measure. You never know when you’ll need to do that on the trail.

The triangle of poles that he had to have his front hooves in and side pass around was confusing to him, but he was starting to catch on to the whole “pole obstacle” thing and it went fairly smoothly.

I was a little worried about riding him through the hanging tattered tarp that was blowing in the wind, but once he put his nose on one piece, he was bored with it.

My next big challenge was backing between the little round pen we had just done those obstacles in and the warm up round pen that had about a half-dozen kids in it galloping around. Frankly, we don’t do a lot of backing and have just started working on it. He was super; we backed through, did our turn on the haunches, went nicely down the loose dirt hill and headed to the log drag.

This was situated in a spot where he had earlier done most of his spooking and hopping about. He just didn’t like the spot. But we went nice and slow, and although he was very suspicious of that log dragging along behind him, he let me do it.

We walked our little serpentine through the cones and then went around on up to the last three obstacles.

The mattress. Fortunately, there had been a trail clinic up at Ernie Howlett Park the week before, and the clinic participants had left the mattress in the arena where I was turning him out. I was able to hand walk him over it once before they came to collect it; however, I’d never ridden him over one. He walked right up to it and stepped up as if he does it all the time. Then he decided that this, too, must be a great toy and started pawing it and trying to pick it up while we were one it. I was a little worried he

might want to lay down on it, but with a bit of urging, I got him off. Whew!

Next was the tilting bridge. Clankety clank, up one end and then thunk as it see-sawed to the other side, and down we went. He was so interested in the little herd of horses playing in the pasture next to us that I don’t think he even noticed that it moved. We have never been on one of those so he got lots of praise for that one.

Final obstacle was to raise a black plastic garbage bag filled with rattling aluminum cans by a rope that was over a tall branch by backing up and then to lower it again. He was a bit suspicious, but trusted me that this was a “normal” thing to do.

That was it! And guess what? We won the class and we got a ribbon and a trophy! A real trophy, too, with engraving and everything. I am just tickled pink. It was a huge class. I’m so proud of Godivan!

The whole show was a blast, with barrel racing, pole bending, egg and spoon races, a champagne challenge, and a costume class. It was amazing watching the pole bending and barrel racing. My heart was in my throat most of the time, and I nearly hyperventilated from gasping every time someone went around a barrel. I am just in awe of those daredevil, speed-demon kids and their horses. Just wow.

So next year, when they have the Dapplegray Rings Ring Fling Play Day & Gymkhana, saddle your horse up and head on down. I guarantee you’ll have a blast. I did.

Oh, and the tricky plumbing issue was fixed by the time I dragged myself home exhausted, covered in dust and sweat, and grinning from ear to ear.

That, folks, is what I call a good day. U

Portuguese Bend Riding Club
Upcoming Clinics and Events

Hunter/Jumper
Patrick Spanton: October 23, November 12, 19, and 26, December 3 and 10

Dressage
Louise Koch:
November 6, 7, 13, 17, and 20 December 4, 5, 11, and 15

Trainers:
Hunter/Jumper: Jen Hannink Riding School: Mary Hirsch

Western: Callie Bell
Haul In - Ride In - Welcome
Boarding - Training - Lessons

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Gateway Park to be rezoned

by **CATHY GARDNER**
SPECIAL TO THE DISPATCH

On Oct. 22, the Rancho Palos Verdes Planning Commission voted to change the Gateway Park designation from agricultural/hazard/single family residential to passive recreation. The vote was four in favor with one abstention.

Gateway Park is part of a plan that includes giving the city land (from the Hon purchase) to enlarge Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy holdings and upkeep responsibility. No trail location changes are planned with these actions.

RPV does not have an approved

description of what “active recreation” and “passive recreation” include. Commissioners alluded to using the PVPLC descriptions, but this remains to be officially approved by the city.

The PVPLC currently allows equestrian and cycling activities as part of the passive recreation designation.

Equestrian concerns

RPV City Geologist Jim Lancaster said the ground, because of the earth movement, was “not compatible to horse corrals and rings.” This may be a contradiction to plans for a future designated RPV Horse Park approved by RPV City Council years back.

Lancaster and RPV Community Development Director Joel Rojas wondered about horses and bikers eroding the area, especially because of the sandbox area movement of up to 2 feet a year.

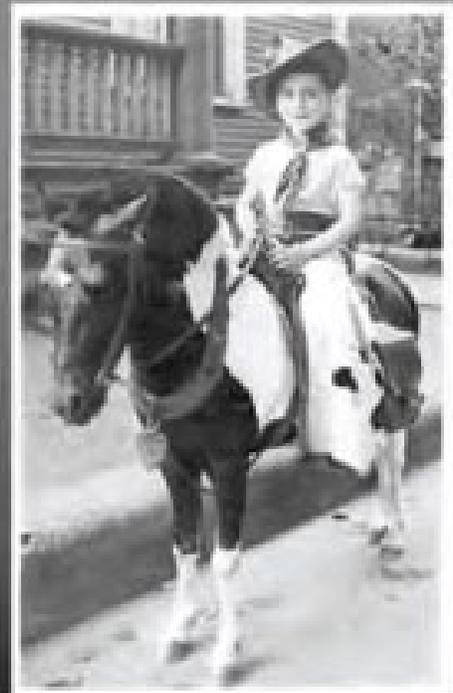
Both city representatives noted that the parking of horse trailers (along with school buses, trash, etc.) may be an issue in the now-proposed parking area north of Palos Verdes Drive South. Rojas mentioned scheduling a public workshop to address the parking need at the bottom of the Land Conservancy hillside area to reduce congestion at Del Cerro Park before a parking lot location is set in crushed road base. **U**

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TRAIL CROSSING: Plans could put horses, riders, pedestrians in danger

Continued from Page 1.

of the trail.

The Palos Verdes Peninsula Horsemen's Association Board of Directors wrote a letter to the director of the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Board of Supervisors in protest of this plan. The letter cited concerns about allowing persons unaware of the unpredictability of horses to possibly cause or receive injuries as a result of using the trail as a pedestrian crossing. We are particularly concerned because of the popularity of this stretch of trail as a main artery and because it is popular for riding at a trot or canter, as it provides good forward visibility and is a straightaway.

At the time the letter was sent, the Board of Directors was under the impression that the city owned the trail because this was stated to be so by city staff at a few public meetings. Only later did the Board of Directors learn that the property is part of an easement and belongs to RHUMC.

A representative from the South Coast Botanic Gardens and the RHUMC pastor attended a meeting of the RHE Equestrian Committee, where they agreed not to put the pathway into use until equestrians were allowed to provide input regarding appropriate signage and advance notice, as well as until liability concerns by the city were resolved. The equestrian committee also voted to demand that the county and church cease construction of the project. Because the committee serves only in an advisory role, there was no way to enforce that resolution, and the construction of the pathway on the Botanic Garden property, as well as the gate that allows access to the trail, was completed.

What is extremely concerning to the PVPHA Board of Directors is the idea that liability coverage seems to be of greater concern to the agencies involved rather than avoiding creating conditions where injuries may occur. What they propose will bring non-recreational users with no experience or knowledge of how to behave around equines into direct conflict with horseback riders, yet they expect people to read signs and know what to do.

The Board of Directors feels it is irresponsible to place horses, riders and unsuspecting pedestrians in a situation where they will be forced to interact. Many riders with nervous or green horses use this quiet trail, and we cannot contemplate the bad situations that may arise from



SATELLITE IMAGE

This satellite image shows the approximate location of the trail crossing.

allowing pedestrians to cross, all day long on weekends during the busiest time of trail use as proposed by the county. The Board of Directors believes the church and county's plan constitutes a usurping of the trail for non-recreational use, creates a hazard, and represents interference with the purpose of the easement.

The county has provided a draft fact sheet and Frequently Asked Questions, which is posted on the PVPHA's official website at pvpha.org/announcements.

This matter is scheduled for the Nov. 12 RHE City Council meeting. It is imperative that equestrians appear in large numbers to voice their strong objection to permitting this crosswalk to be placed on an equestrian and hiking trail. This must be stopped now, and your assistance is needed. If you cannot appear in person, please write to the council and let them know you are opposed to this crossing.

The mayor and council may be contacted via email:

- Frank Zerunyan: FrankZ@ci.rolling-hills-estates.ca.us
- Susan Seamans: SusanS@ci.rolling-hills-estates.ca.us
- Steve Zuckerman: SteveZ@ci.rolling-hills-estates.ca.us
- John Addleman: JohnA@ci.rolling-hills-estates.ca.us
- Judy Mitchell: JudyM@ci.rolling-hills-estates.ca.us

Equestrians can also contact RHE City Hall by calling 310-377-1577. U

Letters: PVPHA should not oppose crossing

OMG, get over it!

The crossing has already been built! It's a simple opening in the fence from the Botanic Gardens to the trail, which was already open on the church side. It's just off the corner of the trail that comes from Palos Verdes Drive North, past the school and the church and connects to the Botanic Garden trail. It is already an intersection where riders have to be looking for cross traffic. It is not a "blind" crossing, not in any way obscured by trees or bushes, which could be trimmed back in any case.

There is absolutely no reason pedestrians should not have access to or be able to cross any of the equestrian trails, at any time, for any purpose. For safety purposes the Church might be encouraged to provide a crossing guard—not so much for the riders but to ensure that small children, who don't look or can be drawn to the horses if they see them, aren't allowed to wander out into the trail.

This is exactly the kind of unthoughtful, knee-jerk, "no one on the trails but us" reaction that gives the riders a reputation for being selfish about trail use and generally obstructive about changes. Please re-think this stance and withdraw your objections, which are groundless.

—Lisa Blank

I am disappointed that the Palos Verdes Peninsula Horsemen's Association has taken a stance against this crossing situation with the daycare/church/gardens. Pedestrians use this trail all the time. Cutting back foliage is an easy sightline cure.

I think each time we, as trail users, object to sharing a trail in this city, we are shooting ourselves in the foot. These people are our neighbors.

There are some concerns with hikers on the trail, but that needs to be our (horseback riders) responsibility—not theirs.

Let's pick our battles carefully.

—Sheryl Steckel

Response from the Board of Directors

We understand that the PVPHA Board of Directors' position on this matter may seem like a knee-jerk reaction, especially since our email message to the membership did not include much background on the matter. In fact, we have been involved in public discourse

on the matter over the last couple months.

We were first alerted to the matter when PVPHA members noticed the construction and tried to find out what it was for.

When they contacted the city of Rolling Hills Estates, city staff told them they knew nothing about the construction or any project. It was not until the Board of Directors dug up the agreement online that the city—and the board—learned of the church, school and county's plan to use the trail as a crosswalk.

In fact, there is no mention of the equestrian trail crossing in any portion of the agreement, nor was RHE ever advised or consulted as to the implementation of this crossing—yet it was brought to a vote by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors.

We feel it is our duty to try to preserve historical and current use of the trail exclusively for hiking and equestrian recreation, not as a pedestrian crosswalk. And, just as a group trail ride should be geared to the least experienced rider, we believe the trails should be kept safe for the least-experienced riders and riders with nervous or green horses. To post unsightly signs on the trail and allow intermittent groups of inattentive pedestrians intent on reaching their destinations will introduce an unpredictable and unsettling environment for riders. Because of the variable frequency of these conditions, it will not represent an environment to which their horses can become accustomed. Sensitive horses can become excited at any significant—or even sometimes even minor—changes to trail conditions.

We must do our best to keep trails safe for all riders. We believe we must stand up for ourselves at this juncture, because nobody else will. If we find that we are unable to persuade the city to support us, or that there is no legal standing to prevent the church and county from doing what they want, then we will offer suggestions for how to make the crossing as safe as possible under the circumstances. We hope that our members will appreciate our position, which we believe is for the general good and the preservation of the trails for recreation, and that members appreciate the need to be united in our causes.

Email letters to the editor to pvpha2010@gmail.com. Letters may be edited for spelling, grammar, punctuation and style. U

ROAD TO THE MUSTANG MILLION

Local riders compete for big money at the Mustang Million.

by **NANCY WILDMAN**
VP MEMBERSHIP

My road to the Mustang Million started at a Palos Verdes Peninsula Horsemen's Association meeting in March when I was introduced to Wylene Wilson and the movie in which she was featured, *Wild Horse, Wild Ride*. Visiting with Wylene was Marissa Rogers and her mustang mare, Black Ice. What followed was a week of clinics and lessons with Wilson and Rogers, which awakened in me a desire to become a better rider so that perhaps someday I could adopt and train my own wild mustang.

The next stop along the way was the Extreme Mustang Makeover in Norco on May 4-5. I had heard that Rogers and Black Ice were going to be there, so I decided to go and cheer them on. The pair competed against about 60 other horse and rider teams in preliminary events including a pattern class, handling and conditioning, obstacles, and a 4-mile trail challenge that is unique to the Norco Extreme Mustang Makeover. After preliminary classes, the top 10 finalists moved on to the Freestyle Finals, where they had the opportunity to be creative with routines involving props, costumes and music. By the end of the evening, Rogers and Black Ice captured the reserve champion position!

Following the awards presentation, all competing mustangs were available for adoption to the public through an auction process. Every competing mustang found a new home, selling for an average adoption fee of \$1,400. The high seller was the champion mustang mare Mariposa, who was adopted for \$7,000.

The next day, a new group of wild mustangs was adopted through a bidding process to the public. Every one of these horses was eligible to compete in the Mustang Million, scheduled for Fort Worth, Texas on Sept. 16-22. The Mustang Million offers \$1 million in cash and prizes, as well as a division for every level of equestrian.

Among the bidders was Wilson, who bought a 4-year-old bay gelding that she later named King of Hearts. From our own neighborhood were Kati Mosteller of Manhattan Beach, who adopted a bay gelding that she named Bravo, and Cheryl Dair, who went home with a chestnut mare she named Sierra.

The Norco auction was one of several in California, Or-

gon, Texas and Tennessee where trainers could adopt mustangs eligible for the Fort Worth competition.

Tom Hagwood of Torrington, Wyo., who won the Legends division, adopted his first choice—a 5-year-old sorrel gelding, Merv—at the Oregon auction.

“Merv was in a large pen of geldings,” Hagwood later said. “He wasn’t meek, but wasn’t tough or the leader of the group. He seemed to have the right amount of courage. It was love at first sight.”

One-hundred-and-thirty-seven days later, my husband and I flew to Fort Worth Texas to watch the Mustang Million, the richest wild horse training event the Mustang Heritage Foundation has ever produced. The purpose of this and every other MHF competition is to showcase the beauty, versatility and trainability of these rugged horses, which roam freely on public lands throughout the West, where they are protected by the BLM under federal law. The BLM periodically removes excess animals from the range to ensure herd health and protect rangeland resources. Thousands of the removed animals are then made available each year to the public for adoption. More than 5,500 wild horses have been adopted through MHF events and programs since 2007.

The Mustang Million was made possible through a partnership with the Bureau of Land Management and the generosity of sponsors Ram Trucks, Western Horseman, Zoetis, Vetericyn, Roper Apparel & Footwear, Twister Trailer, RES Equine Products, Gist Silversmiths, Martin Saddlery and Smith Brothers.

More than 190 trainers and the BLM mustangs they gentled and trained since April entered the Legends division of Mustang Million with hopes of winning their share of the \$624,000 designated purse and a number of prizes, including a custom Martin saddle. Trainers completed three preliminary classes including: horsemanship, trail, and a pattern class. The trainers with top 20 combined preliminary scores were invited back for the freestyle finals. Scores for the finals were awarded for a combination of compulsory maneuvers, horsemanship and artistic interpretation. Tom Hagwood of Torrington, Wyo. and his mustang gelding Merv led the pack after the three preliminary classes. A clean slate was given to each competitor entering the finals.

Hagwood's winning freestyle performance focused

mainly on horsemanship maneuvers.

“Being from Wyoming, I couldn’t bring a lot of props to Texas,” he said after the competition. “When people asked me what I was doing for the finals, I told them I just wanted to show a broke horse.”

On Sept. 22, a week of exciting competition came to a fantastic end with the crowning of the Mustang Million Legends Division Champion. Hagwood and Merv received a check for \$200,000 and a 2014 Ram truck for their efforts.

Hagwood finished first with a total score of 357 points. Supreme Extreme Mustang Makeover Champion Bobby Kerr of Hico, Texas, who qualified two horses for the finals, finished second and third with his Mustang geldings, winning a total of \$160,000. Road to the Horse Champion Dan James placed fourth with Smart Little Mustang and was awarded \$50,000. James was also voted fan favorite by the attending crowd and received a bonus of \$5,000. Mary Kitzmiller from Kemp, Texas was given \$50,000 for a fifth-place finish with Gandalf the Bay, a 4-year-old gelding adopted by Kelly Jackson. Wilson received \$20,000 for her sixth-place finish on King of Hearts.

Manhattan Beach resident Mosteller and her 4-year-old gelding Bravo, who were featured in the June Dispatch, came in a very respectable forty-third. Although Cheryl Dair did not place, she did an excellent job training Sierra, whom she is looking to re-home.

In the future, Hagwood wants to continue to campaign his mustang gelding. He plans to qualify the horse for the National Reined Cow Horse Association World Championship Show. He says Merv’s single greatest attribute is his mind.

“He is the greatest horse I’ve ever trained,” Hagwood said. “He has a home with this family.”

In addition to the Legends competitors, there were classes for youth, and specialty events including cow work, dressage, hunter hack and trail classes. I was especially impressed by the youth who worked with yearlings in hand. The connection between the youth and their mustangs was enough to bring tears to my eyes.

Complete results can be found at mustangmillion.com. Photos and highlight videos posted at facebook.com/extrememustangmakeover. There are also many YouTube videos available online.

When I’m ready, I’ll bring home a mustang of my own. In the meantime, however, I intend to go to more MHF competitions. The 2014 schedule of events will be posted soon, so check the MHF website periodically for updates.

This year brought unexpected challenges to the MHF. Due to the federal budget sequestration, the MHF experienced significant funding cuts from the BLM. Two Ex-

treme Mustang Makeover events were cancelled, and the trainer incentive program was put on hold.

The MHF can survive and continue to expand events and programs with your financial support. Please consider joining the Mustang Nation to allow the MHF to continue to produce wild horse training programs, education, and events for youth and adults. U

—Kyla Hogan of the Mustang Heritage Foundation contributed to this report.

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Cowboy Dressage emphasizes 'light hands,' 'soft feel'

by SHARON WARRINER
SPECIAL TO THE DISPATCH

It usually starts this way for me. Someone says "Have you tried _____ with your horse? My reply is, "No, but I'd like to try." So when my friend, Kelly Yates, told me she and Michelle Goodwin were hosting a Cowboy Dressage clinic with Eitan Beth-Halachmy, I thought, *Why not?* Many of you know my horse India and I try many things, including sorting cows at the Empty Saddle Club, gymkhanas, obstacle courses, ACTHA rides and India's favorite pastime, jumping.

I have long admired the many precision moves dressage horses are asked to do but I am a firm believer in "soft feel" and much prefer the western saddle, so traditional dressage was not on our list of things to try.

Beth-Halachmy started Cowboy Dressage for those of us who feel, as he says, "When Dressage fits your needs but a Stetson fits your lifestyle".

As Eitan writes on his website: "Lightness' ... represents the highest achievement between horse and rider. There are no short cuts on the road to its success. It is a pure partnership built on trust and reward. Lightness is accomplished when full use of the rider's correct aids have maintained the horse in balance, cadence and carriage. When a horse is taught to 'balance himself' and not rely on the riders hands to hold him in frame, lightness occurs. For me, lightness represents my own journey in horsemanship. It is what I wish to accomplish with each horse I train. For me, the principles of dressage are the foundation to 'Light Hands



COURTESY SHARON WARRINER

The author and her horse, India, participate in Eitan Beth-Halachmy's Cowboy Dressage clinic at Ernie Howlett Park.

Horsemanship.' This is true for every breed and every discipline. I am a western horseman by trade but my light hands were built from the school of dressage. Lightness begins with the lead rope. From there to the advanced horse, it is a long, exciting and rewarding journey. The feel of 'lightness' is like no other. It, in itself is the reward."

We started that Saturday morning in August with Beth-Halachmy working with a group of eight riders to understand the basic principle of Cowboy Dressage: soft feel. Soft feel is not only sending messages to the horse but having the sensitivity and awareness to feel and receive the message the horse sends back. It is contacting the entire horse—his mind, body and spirit—and the partnership of horse and rider together. Beth-Halachmy also emphasized cadence, the ability of the rider to know where the horse's feet are and how to influence them. Both are tall orders to fill and sound somewhat intimidating. Beth-

Halachmy helped put all of us at ease, with his trademark humor and enjoyment of teaching. In no time, we were side passing; riding haunches in and shoulder in; and effortlessly performing Cowboy Dressage Drill Team maneuvers as a group.

On the second and third days of the clinic, Beth-Halachmy called Cowboy Dressage tests for us to ride as individuals. All of us had a great time watching our newfound friends ride tests, chosen by Beth-Halachmy for each rider's ability. By the end of the three day clinic, India and I had made many new friends, ridden several new moves and found a new and exciting pastime that we could practice in the ring, as well as out of the trail. If you see us side passing down the Botanic Gardens Trail, say hello!

For more information about Cowboy Dressage, the difference between Western Dressage and Cowboy Dressage, and Eitan and Debbie Beth-Halachmy, visit cowboydressage.com. **U**

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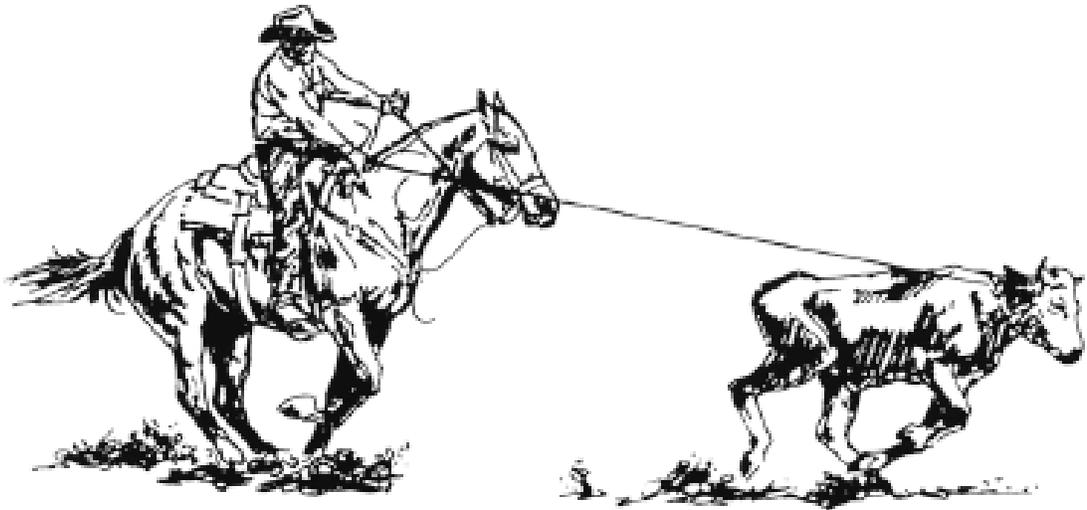
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