

Saddling up for summer fun

Horseback riding a favorite activity at camp for kids with special needs

Written by Sharla Bardin and first printed in America's Horse magazine, which goes to members of the American Quarter Horse Association.

Brighton Squires is all smiles as soon as she sees them.

The 14-year-old puts on her helmet and quickly walks to the round pen.

Her excitement builds with each step. She heads inside the pen, positions herself on the mounting block and waits while a volunteer walks toward her with the horse, Chili. She grins, says hello, swings her right leg over the horse's back, sits up straight on the bareback pad and tells Chili to "Walk on."

Brighton beams as she rides Chili – aka Alot of Advantage – around the enclosure and waves to the crowd of kids eagerly waiting for their turn. Chili is one of two American Quarter Horses that visits Camp ClapHans, a summer camp in Norman, Okla., for kids with disabilities.

"All year, she talks about these horses," said Heather Squires, Brighton's mom. "It is the first thing she mentions when she's coming to camp."

Those happy horseback riding memories is what motivates Greg

Gaston to bring his horses to camp each summer. Gaston is the owner of the Diamond j Ranch in Purcell, Okla.

"It amazes me the positive impact horses can have on a person," Gaston said.



Two of the camp favorites are registered American Quarter Horses King Glo Jessie (l) and Alot of Advantage, aka, Jessie and Chili. Jessie is a 21-year-old gelding. Chili is a 15-year-old gelding.

He loves watching the campers' excitement and expressions when they go for a ride.

"It's the greatest experience," he said. "You like to see kids discover that 'Hey, this is cool' feeling."

Gaston is also the marketing director at the J. D. McCarty Center for children with developmental disabilities in Norman. The center is a pediatric rehabilitation hospital that provides medical

care and physical, occupational, speech and language therapy for children on an inpatient and outpatient basis.

Camp ClapHans is an outreach program of the center and serves kids ages 8 to 18 from across Oklahoma. Camp activities include archery, arts and crafts, camp fires, canoeing, fishing, dances and swimming.

Gaston has brought his horses to the summer camp since it opened in 2013. He also brings them to activities at the McCarty Center so patients have a chance to spend time with horses.

For Gaston, it's an opportunity to share his passion for horses with others and witness the wonders that can happen when kids with disabilities and horses work together.

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See 'A dream comes true'

A dream comes true

Along with Chili, Gaston brings Jessie – aka King Glo Jessie – an American Quarter Horse and Little Joe and Cisco, two American Paint Horses.

Gaston said some of the reasons he uses quarter horses for the task is because of their intelligence and how easy they are to train. They also have a sensitivity that he believes works well with kids with special needs. Chili, for example, will gently drop his head down low by children in wheelchairs so they can get close enough to pet him.

David Higdon also is impressed by the horses that visit the camp. Higdon is a riding instructor who assists Gaston and is also an occupational therapist at the McCarty Center.

“They’re the perfect horses,” Higdon said. “They’re perfect for the job and the environment that



Painted Peppy Bonanza – aka Little Joe (II) – and Heza Dusty Hancock – aka Cisco – are registered American Paint Horses. Little Joe is an 18-year-old gelding. Cisco is a 10-year-old gelding.

we’re in.”

During horseback riding, Gaston and Higdon lift campers onto the horses and lead the kids as they circle the round pen. Volunteers from area high schools and colleges also help lead the horses or side-walk by a camper on horseback.

Gaston said he got interested in bringing his horses to the hospital and camp after reading about the therapeutic benefits of riding. The benefits include improvements to muscle tone, balance, posture, coordination and motor development, according to information from the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International.

Horseback riding also can enhance a kid’s emotional well-being.

“It can help them relax,” Higdon said. “It can help them build their confidence.”

Higdon said he loves seeing the kids smile when they’re interacting with the horses. One of his favorite memories was watching a camper with cerebral palsy start to straighten his posture and become more upright as he rode the horse.

Higdon said he also sees a sense of accomplishment from the campers while they’re riding.

“They’re amazed at what they can do, he said.

There are also kids, such as Brighton, who come to camp and already have a familiarity with horses.

Heather Squires said her daughter – who has intellectual disabilities and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder – used to do hippotherapy, which involves using horseback riding as therapeutic or rehabilitative treatment.

Brighton also visits her neighbors’ horse and helps with grooming and feeding. She also will bring out a chair, sit by the fence and read to the horse.

“She has always loved horses,” her mom said.

Brighton, of Edmond, has attended Camp ClapHans for two years, and the horses remain a highlight for her.

“It solidified her love of this camp,” Heather Squires said.

She believes the horses help her daughter feel relaxed and give her a confidence boost each time she rides.

“The horses calm her and bring an intangible sense of joy,” Heather Squires said.



Brighton Squires waves to waiting campers as she rides Chili around the pen. In the background another camper is getting ready to mount Jessie.

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The Building Block

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A dream comes true.

The horses also bring joy to Gaston, who said he's been fascinated by horses since childhood and always dreamed of owning them.

The Oklahoma native grew up watching cowboy TV shows and John Wayne westerns. As a kid, he visited a friend every summer who owned horses and the two spent the summers riding and watching local calf roping competitions.

Gaston had other friends through the years who owned horses and would invite him along for rides. Also, when he was in high school, Gaston's father bought 10 Shetland ponies and Gaston helped care for them.

Family time and work responsibilities put his dream of owning a horse on hold. Then, in 1997, he decided to surprise his wife, Jane, with a horse for her birthday. Jane Gaston had owned horses when she was younger and missed being able to go for a ride.

He bought her an appendix bred quarter horse that he named "Janie's Diamond." He created a brand for the horse, which later was the inspiration for the name of his ranch – Diamond J.

Initially, the couple talked about taking turns riding the horse.



Jessie, a bay colored horse, is a camp favorite. His easy demeanor makes him popular with campers like Luccinda Locke who is demonstrating her good balance.

"That lasted two weeks," Gaston said, with a smile. "We decided we'd ride together."

So, Gaston bought another horse in less than a month, which was a paint horse named Moon Money.

Gaston said he learned more about horse ownership by reading books and trade publications and attending training, including John Lyons horsemanship clinics.

He eventually bought more horses - he estimates he's owned about 16 – and also participated in team penning and sorting for about 20 years.

Gaston now owns four horses, and is excited that his five grandchildren share in his enjoyment of them.

He sometimes reflects back on that kid growing up who was charmed by the grace, beauty and athleticism of horses and hoped to one day own a few.

"I'm living a childhood dream of being a cowboy."

Gaston may also be inspiring a new generation of cowboys and cowgirls through his work at Camp ClapHans.

Higdon said he's impressed with Gaston's dedication to giving campers the chance to learn more about horses and have the opportunity to ride and spend time with them.

"He's very willing, devoted and committed to go the extra mile to bring his horses," Higdon said.

Gaston said his hope is that campers cherish their time with the horses and leave with fond memories. "I hope it's the moment they remember most about their experience at the McCarty Center."



Camper Faith Benjamin says thank you to Chili after a morning ride at Camp ClapHans. Holding Chili is Greg Gaston. On the right is David Higdon, riding instructor and occupational therapist at the McCarty Center.



The equine program at Camp ClapHans takes a lot of hands to make sure that the campers and horses are safe. These are just a few of the people that make it possible.



Greg Gaston leads Heza Dusty Hancock, aka Cisco, while David Higdon keeps a watchful eye on the rider. Cisco was new to the Camp ClapHans string of horses this season.



David Higdon, left, offers a supporting arm to a camper that's not quite sure about his horse riding decision. The horse is Jessie, a 21-year old gelding that is as steady as they come.



Jessie strikes a pose.

Norman Conquest produces record donation for Camp ClapHans

The Bicycle League of Norman's Norman Conquest Bicycle Tour has benefited the J. D. McCarty Center's Camp ClapHans summer camp program since 2008.

Norman Conquest chairman, Jerry Puckett, has announced that the BLN will donate \$10,000 to Camp ClapHans. This amount doubles the organization's previous high donation.

While the McCarty Center is a state agency, no state funds were used in the construction of Camp ClapHans. It was built entirely with money raised through the J. D. McCarty Center Foundation. The camp is operated in the same manner, through donated and fundraised money. "We are lucky to have the support of groups like BLN who recognize the benefits of programs like Camp ClapHans and are willing to support it," said Greg Gaston, McCarty Center spokesman. "We are very appreciative of this partnership with BLN."

"We had great weather, lots of new riders and the most event sponsors we've ever had," said Puckett. "It was a good event. No injuries. No incidents on the routes and everyone had a good time. The feedback from the riders has been really good."

The Norman Conquest's motto is "Conquer the heat! Conquer the hills!" On a typically hot July morning, 559 riders from Oklahoma, Texas and Arkansas did just that. The riders of all ages, shapes and sizes chose routes of 10, 22, 46 or 64 miles for their own personal conquest.



Cyclists have a lot of equipment that is unique to their sport. A helmet is one of the most important pieces of equipment. In this case the rider makes her helmet whimsical with a 'Marvin the Martian' look. The ends of the filaments glow different colors.

The Grimwood Loop

The 64-mile route was renamed "The Grimwood Loop" this year in honor of fallen cyclist Michael Grimwood, an avid cyclist who was killed last year by an inattentive driver while riding just south of Purcell. The Norman Conquest was one of his favorite events. The Grimwood Loop is the most challenging route of the Norman Conquest.

The DNA Racing Team, from Oklahoma City, has ridden the Norman Conquest for a number of years and always take the Grimwood Loop. This year DNA covered the 64-mile very hilly course in 2 hours and 42 minutes. Friends of the DNA team were overheard chiding them for being 2 minutes slower than last year. It should be noted that some members of the DNA team meet in Oklahoma City and ride to Norman as a warm up to the Norman Conquest, then ride back to Oklahoma City after the event.

The Norman Conquest attracts individuals and teams, each riding for various reasons from enjoyment to the challenge to raising money for a cause. Team Martha is one of the teams that ride for a cause.

Team Martha is based out of South Lake, Texas. The team captain is Bret McIntyre, formerly of Norman. Brit's wife, Martha, has multiple sclerosis. The group made up of members from Texas and Oklahoma ride in events like the Norman Conquest to raise money for MS. Team Martha has been riding together for 8 years and raise an average of \$28,000 a year for MS.

The BLN supports and encourages the growth of recreational bicycling in and around Norman by organizing ride events, supporting bicycle safety and educational activities, participating in local government planning for improved bicycle access and emphasizing the healthful and social aspects of cycling. The BLN hosts semi-weekly group rides during the spring and summer months and maintains the Clear Bay mountain bike trails at Lake Thunderbird. For more information visit www.bicycleleague.com.

Camp ClapHans is a residential summer camp program of the McCarty Center for kids with special needs ages 8 to 18. The camp provides a one-to-one camper to staff ratio. The camp offers the same summer camp activities that any typically developing child would have, it's just that all of Camp ClapHans' activities are adaptable to the camper's ability.

Ride for Recovery benefits riders and kids

Farm Boy. Slingshot. Mongo. Sweed. Toolsac. Totone. Roy Boy. Compass. These are the road names given to men who belong to a brotherhood of clean and sober bikers. They are Survivors.

The Survivors Clean and Sober Motorcycle Club is a national group whose primary purpose is to be in the community for the brother or sister who wants to stop drugging or drinking. The Survivors have all changed their lives through 12-step programs and carry that message wherever they go. Recently, the Survivors MC became an international organization with the establishment of a tribe in New Zealand. Tribe is the term used to identify each club.

Besides being a support group, holding each other accountable for their sobriety, the tribes are also committed to giving back to the community through volunteer work and fundraising.

"Giving back to the community is very important to club members," said Willie "Farm Boy" Moore, president of the Central Oklahoma Survivors. "As addicts, we spent a lot of time taking freely from the community. Giving back to the community is an important part of recovery for us."

On Sunday, Sept. 4, the central Oklahoma tribe hosted their fourth annual Ride for Recovery. The proceeds from this poker run went to support the J. D. McCarty Center's Camp ClapHans program.



McCarty Center patient Joshlynn Irvin got to try on a motorcycle for size during the fourth Annual Ride for Recovery poker run held at the McCarty Center and sponsored by the Survivors Clean and Sober Motorcycle Club.

One hundred and eleven motorcycles from Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado participated in the Ride for Recovery raising \$5,356 for Camp ClapHans. The money was raised from ride fees, raffles and auction items.

One of those riders was Michael "Mayhan" Gravelle of Fort Smith, Ark. He brought his two children, Ariel and Gabe, with him. "I'm glad I can teach them more about biking and show them some of the charitable work the club does," said Gravelle. "It's good for them to see what we're really about."

The tribe members don't greet each other with a secret club handshake. They greet each other with "holding on for dear life" bear hugs. It goes without saying that they understand each other's struggles and commitment to change, and that they are there to support one another.

Members wear a patch on their vests, written in all caps, that says it all – I AM MY BROTHERS KEEPER.

Farm Boy said that without their sobriety, they wouldn't have their jobs or their families. Those are the important things that are worth fighting every

day for these tribe members. After all, they are Survivors.



This patch is worn on the vest of every member of the Survivors Clean and Sober Motorcycle Club as a reminder that they are there to support one another in their recovery and to help those who seek it.



Waiting for the ride to start, participants in the Ride for Recovery got to meet some of the McCarty Center patients.



Participants in the fourth Annual Ride for Recovery, hosted by the Survivors Clean and Sober Motorcycle Club, gather for ride instructions and a word of prayer before mounting up for the day's ride.

More Ride for Recovery photos on page 6



Riders from five states line up at the McCarty Center to begin the fourth Annual Ride for Recovery poker run. Proceeds from the event support Camp ClapHans.

Future medical providers run for the McCarty Center

The Oklahoma City University Physician Assistant program's Class of 2018 is hosting Trick or Treatment, a 5K run and 1 mile fun run, to benefit the McCarty Center's Camp ClapHans summer camp program for kids with special needs ages 8 to 18.

This USA Track and Field certified-event will be held on Saturday, Oct. 22. The run begins at 9 a.m. and starts at the OCU softball field. This will be a family-friendly event with face painting, games and Halloween fun. Halloween costumes are encouraged.

The OCU PA Class of 2018 is the inaugural class for this program. With doctors in short supply, there is a growing need for physician assistants. The PA education model is based on the fast-track training of doctors during World War II, which allows PAs to complete training in less time.

Physician assistants typically obtain medical histories, perform examinations and procedures, order treatments, diagnose diseases, prescribe medication, order and interpret



Michael "Mayhan" Gravelle, with his kids Gabe and Ariel, rode in from Fort Smith, Ark., to participate in the Ride for Recovery. Mayhan used this ride to teach his kids more about motorcycles and the charitable work that the Survivors do.

diagnostic tests, refer patients to specialists as required and first or second-assist in surgery.

Physician Assistants work in hospitals, clinics and other types of health facilities, or in academic administration, and exercise autonomy in medical decision making. PA's practice in primary care or medical specialties, including emergency medicine, surgery, cardiology, etc. according to the legal scope of practice in which PA's may participate. Their practice is in collaboration with a physician.

"We are proud to be the first class in the OCU PA program and we hope to establish this run as a tradition that we can pass down to the next incoming class," said Melissa Zenner, Class of 2018 treasurer. "We heard several presentations from class members about potential charities to support with our effort and the class voted on Camp ClapHans."

The entry fee for the 5K is \$20 and \$15 for the 1 mile fun run. Children under 3 are free.

You can register online at www.sign-meup.com/116493. Make sure to register before Oct. 12 to guarantee your T-shirt size.

For more information about the Trick or Treatment 5K run or 1 mile fun run, contact Zenner at 405.410.9480 or mzenner@my.okcu.edu.



Willie "Farm Boy" Moore, president of the Center Oklahoma Survivors (standing left), checks the lineup of 111 bikes as they prepare to leave their first stop of the day on the fourth Annual Ride for Recovery poker run benefiting the McCarty Center's Camp ClapHans program.

Clothing donation request

We have some children who upon admission to the hospital bring little or no clothing with them. That's why we maintain a clothing closet of new and lightly used clothing for boys and girls.

We are currently in need of some very specific items. Here's the list:

- Jeans for boys in kids to men's sizes.
- Jeans for girls size 6 regular to 16 regular.
- Girls pants/leggings size 6 to 14/16.
- Winter hats & gloves only. We currently have enough coats & jackets.
- Shoes of any size (tennis shoes in particular because they work well with patient's ankle-foot orthotics.)
- Boys underwear any size (new please)
- Girls underwear any size and bras (training size & up) (new please)
- Over the calf/knee socks for boys & girls (these are also great for kids wearing ankle-foot orthotics.)

Donations are accepted Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Ask for Jennifer Giamelle, Greg Gaston or Sharla Bardin.

OMCA drive, chip and putt for the kids

The Oklahoma Municipal Contractors Association held its 30th annual golf tournament to benefit the J. D. McCarty Center on Sept. 12 at the Twin Hills Golf and Country Club.

One hundred forty-four golfers, that's 36 foursomes, teed off on an unusually cool September morning in a shotgun start.

"We were having to turn teams away," said Rick Moore, executive director of OMCA. "That's a nice problem to have. People are really starting to get what we do this for. It's for the kids."

"It's for the kids" was a phrase heard all over the golf course as the beverage and snack carts made their way around the course. Golfers would tip the beverage cart drivers with the saying "It's for the kids." The largest tip of the day was \$100.

OMCA also had a record number of presenting sponsors for the event.

In comments made during the post game awards, Moore indicated that OMCA would probably equal the \$53,000 donation of last year. He just needed to get all the bills in first.

Proceeds from this event will go toward the operations of Camp ClapHans, the McCarty Center's residential summer camp program for kids with special needs ages 8 to 18.



This is just a part of the 72 golf carts lined up ready to take 144 golfers onto the course.



Golfers practice their putting in the early morning light awaiting the start of the 30th annual OMCA golf tournament.



Golfers watch as teammates tee shot on hole #10 at the Twin Hills Golf & Country Club.



While members of OMCA were enjoying a nice Monday morning on the golf course, their businesses were still working. And so were the golfers as long as a cell phone was close at hand.

Free therapeutic screening at the J.D. McCarty Center

A therapeutic screening is a unique opportunity for families with children with special needs to meet with experts who can share information about services that could benefit your child. The free screenings are offered at the J.D. McCarty Center for children with developmental disabilities in Norman. Here's how the process works:

- To schedule a free screening, call the center's social services department at 405-307-2800.**
- Meet with the center's screening team that includes a pediatrician, nurse, psychology clinician and social worker.**
- The screening offers families the opportunity to talk with experts and learn about statewide resources. Here are other benefits of the process:**
 - Families receive a tour of the McCarty Center and information about services at the center and state and federal programs that can also assist a child with special needs.
 - The screening team can assist a family with determining what educational needs a child may have and how to work with that child's school to meet those needs.
 - A screening can help connect families with parent support services.
 - The screening team can offer tips to parents about managing behaviors, as well as answer questions about medications, such as benefits and side effects.
- We're here to help.**
 - The screening helps get you connected to the people and programs at the J.D. McCarty Center and throughout the state.
 - The center is a pediatric rehab hospital that specializes in the care and treatment of children with developmental disabilities from birth to age 21.
 - We provide medical care and physical, occupational, speech and language therapy on an inpatient and outpatient basis. We also offer specialty clinics, including an equipment clinic, a respite program, and outreach programs, such as a dance class for kids with disabilities and free community events.
 - We have a team of physicians, nurses, therapists, direct-care specialists, psychology clinicians, nutritionists and insurance specialists who are ready to help your family.

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J.D.M. | ID. McCarty Center | @McCartyCenter

Mobile screenings on the road again

The McCarty Center's mobile screening team will be on the road again, Friday, Oct. 21 in Hobart at the Hobart Public Library from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

This free therapeutic screening is a unique opportunity for parents of kids with developmental disabilities to meet with our experts. Our team will discuss what services the McCarty Center has that might benefit their child, as well as other resources around the state.

The mobile screening team consists of a nurse, social worker and a psychology clinician.

Mobile therapeutic screenings and screenings done at the hospital are by appointment. To set up your appointment, call 405.307.2800 and ask to speak to someone in the social work department.



Norman Sibshops kick off 7th year at McCarty Center

Norman Sibshops, a program for the bothers and sisters of children with developmental disabilities and special health needs, will kick off its seventh year on Saturday, Oct. 22 at the McCarty Center.

Sibshops is a program that seeks to provide siblings of children with special needs with opportunities for peer support. Because Sibshops are designed for school-aged children, peer support is provided within a lively, recreational context that emphasizes a kids'-eye-view.

Sibshops are not therapy, group or otherwise, although their effect may be therapeutic for some of the participants. Sibshops acknowledge that most brothers and sisters of people with special needs, like their parents, are doing well, despite the challenges of having a brother or sister with an illness or disability. Consequently, while Sibshop facilitators always keep an eye open for participants who may need additional services, Sibshops take a wellness approach.

The goals of Sibshops are to provide the bothers and sisters of children with special needs an opportunity to meet other siblings in a relaxed, recreational setting to provide an opportunity to discuss common joys and concerns with other kids in similar situations; to learn more about the implications of their sibling's special needs; and provide parents and other professionals with opportunities to learn more about the concerns and opportunities frequently experienced by bothers and sisters of people with special needs.

Norman Sibshops are scheduled for Saturday, Oct. 22, Nov. 12, Dec. 3, Feb. 25, March 25 and April 29.

The cost of each Sibshop is \$6 per child. Lunch is included. Scholarships are available.

Andrea Williams is the Norman Sibshop coordinator. Williams is a first generation trained facilitator by Don Meyer, the Sibling Support Project Director, and she's a sister to a brother with a developmental disability. She is actively involved in her brother's care and is fully in tune with what siblings feel and the questions they have on their mind.

In the spring of 2005, University of Washington colleagues Amanda Johnson and Susan Sandall conducted a survey of Sibshops grads (ages 18-34) to see if there was any long-term impact on Sibshops participants' relationships with their siblings. From comments from Sibshop grads and their parents, it appeared that it did, but until the 2005 study there wasn't any research to confirm the observations.

The study concluded that the positive effects of the Sibshop program are not only apparent, but also enduring. A few of the findings included: over 90% of the respondents said Sibshops had a positive effect on the feelings they had for their siblings; Sibshops taught coping strategies to over two-thirds of the respondents; three-fourths reported that Sibshops affected their adult lives; and 94% said they would recommend Sibshops to others.

Norman Sibshops are sponsored by the McCarty Center, Oklahoma Developmental Disabilities Council, The Oklahoma Family Network, Sooner Success Child Study Center Program and the Children's Hospital Foundation.

Day of Caring volunteers host carnival

Employees from McClain Bank, Republic Bank & Trust and Raising Cane's volunteered at the hospital for the United Way's annual Day of Caring on Sept. 16.

Day of Caring is an opportunity for Norman businesses and organizations to take on service projects for community agencies. The annual event is organized by the United Way of Norman.

The McCarty Center volunteers put on a carnival for the hospital's patients.



Cory (I) and Direct Care Specialist Deborah McCaslin play the ring toss game during the Day of Caring carnival for McCarty Center patients.



Direct Care Specialist Crystal Collier helps Cory and Lucas make a necklace during the Day of Caring carnival. Assisting the boys is Day of Caring volunteer Danielle Collins with Raising Cane's.



Norman United Way Day of Caring volunteers.