RIVER VALLEY RIDERS

REVIEW

WINTER 2020-2021

RIVER VALLEY RIDERS
EQUINE ASSISTED ACTIVITIES & THERAPIES

Letter from Cheryl Holt, Executive Director

Hello All,

This has been a different year for all of us. 2020 has humanized businesses in entirely new ways, people are logging into meetings online, the new business casual may or may not include pants, and people have become accustomed to seeing their "colleagues"- kids, dogs, cats and significant others passing through their meetings (it has happened to me ☺).

This was the first year River Valley Riders did not have our program operating. We certainly miss our participants, volunteers, and the horses! Our small staff was kept busy doing strategic planning, applying for new grant opportunities, keeping in touch with everyone, managing improvements at the Afton site and planning our first ever virtual fundraising events.

Speaking of grants, in March of 2020 River Valley Riders was awarded a $300,000 matching grant from the FS Foundation. The FS Foundation's mission is to foster independence, self-reliance, pride of craftsmanship, sense of purpose, and increased access to alternative learning styles for under-resourced adults. They are a private family foundation and RVR shares their values. We have three years to raise the matching funds, and with the help of many generous donors in 2020, we are already more than halfway to the goal of $300,000! ***Thank you to all who have supported RVR!!***

Despite the difficult times, River Valley Riders has continued to grow. We now have a long-term savings account "Sustain our Mission", thanks to a very generous donor. We paved the driveway and parking lot, brought in natural gas ready for heating the arena and office building. These improvements are part of the Phase 2 build plan for Afton. We continue to fundraise so we can finish Phase 2, which is erecting the office building shell with heated viewing room and indoor bathrooms, plus the mounting annex.

I look forward to 2021 with excitement, courage, and peace! I am courageously planning that we will have programming in 2021 but may start out with a phased approach. I am so excited to see EVERYONE again!! And being at River Valley Riders with ALL of you gives me peace.

Sending wishes for health, happiness and love this Holiday Season! Here is to better times ahead for everyone. Happy 2021!

Warm regards,
Cheryl

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About River Valley Riders

The mission of River Valley Riders is to enrich the lives of children and adults with special needs by providing equine assisted activities and therapies.

RVR is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Donations are tax-deductible as allowed by law. Financial statements will be provided upon request. EIN# 41-1949447

Lessons are conducted in accordance with the safety, training and instructional guidelines of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International.

PATH INTERNATIONAL
Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International
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Therapy Horse Tanner

Tanner, a big strong 17-year-old Norwegian Fjord Horse gelding was generously donated to River Valley Riders by Joan and Roger Berg.

Tanner has proven his abilities as a therapy horse with 13 years of service. He is one of our hardest working equines, providing therapeutic riding and carriage driving lessons four days per week totaling up to 17 hours per week in 2019.

One of our participants shared:
"I have known Tanner for the last 13 years. 2007 was my first year in a therapeutic riding program, his too. We were both 4 years old. When we both got older, I used to ride him…he was a great horse for that. He was always patient while I was getting on him and riding. Now he is still as patient while he pulls the carriage that I drive. He listens really well to my commands. On top of being beautiful, I feel safe while driving the carriage he pulls. I am confident in his abilities in keeping me safe. I make him work hard and he never quits on me, he just keeps moving. Tanner has given me the ability to do something I never thought I would be able to do. I love him!"

Tanner has given hundreds of riding lessons in our program to people of all ages with a variety of special needs. In 2016 he also took on the role of being a carriage horse in our driving program. Because of Tanner, more participants now enjoy the benefits of carriage driving. He responds beautifully to voice commands so our drivers can control his speed and direction with words (walk, trot, whoa, gee, ha) in addition or substitution to the student reins.

Tanner makes it possible for our riders and drivers to achieve greater potential! **Thank you Tanner!**

2021 Program Update

Our Board of Directors and Staff are committed to provide lessons in 2021. Hooray! Our plan to resume services balances the benefits of our program to the risks of the virus situation.

Currently, we expect to start lessons in April with limited classes using a phased approach.

The phased approach MAY look like this - for Spring Session (April) only riders who do not require side walkers and who will wear a mask would start riding. Carriage Driving will still be on hold. Riding class sizes would be smaller and the lesson schedule for individuals could be temporarily different than what they signed up for.

Then in the first Summer Session (June) we would re-evaluate and see if the program could be opened to more riders requiring additional support, plus start Carriage Driving lessons and Hippotherapy classes as well. This is all tentative at this point, we will have to continue to evaluate the virus situation and adjust the plan accordingly.

Even with the phased in approach, we need EVERYONE planning to ride with River Valley Riders in 2021 to register for the program in February and select the best days/times for your rider/driver. The registration will be conducted as it has always been, RVR will mail out the registration forms first week of February and people are accepted into the program on a first come/first serve basis until we are filled up. Then the additional participants would be put on our wait list for a chance to fill in a spot that may open during the year or to be a substitute rider.

Regarding Volunteer Training, with the phased in approach, our volunteer training would move out to tentatively June. The 2021 training will not be a large gathering but focused on only the new volunteers. We will keep you promptly informed about any updates as decisions are made in early 2021.

Thank you all for your patience and understanding as we navigate these new situations.

Leave a Legacy with River Valley Riders

Some of you have informed us of your intention to include a gift to River Valley Riders in your will or trust. Thank you for these generous future gifts!

If you are creating or revising your will or trust, please consider including a gift to River Valley Riders. This will allow you to retain your assets during your lifetime, provide for your loved ones, and leave a legacy that makes a difference after your lifetime.

A gift in a will or trust may consist of:

- A specific amount of money;
- A percentage of your estate;
- Specific items;
- Vehicles;
- Securities;
- Real estate.

You may designate your gift as an “unrestricted” or “restricted” gift. You may choose:

- Unrestricted: to provide for general operating expenses related to our programs;
- Restricted - Fund the Vison: to support the expansion of equine assisted services and the improvement to the Afton facility;
- Restricted - Sustain Our Mission: to ensure our mission continues for future generations.

The new “Sustain Our Mission” fund was established in 2020 with a lead gift from a very generous donor to protect our organization’s sustainability, ensure future income from a non-endowed fund and provide for long-term savings for major expenses.

Ask your estate planning attorney to help you include a few sentences in your will or trust to make your gift.

Please contact River Valley Riders to share your plans to make a gift through your will or trust. We would love to thank you for your generosity. Please contact us even if you wish to remain anonymous. We are committed to honoring your wishes.

In Memory of David Steeves

In Memory of David Steeves

We are so sad to share the news that David passed away on November 24, 2020. He left us far too early at age 30.

David was one of our first riders starting with RVR in 2000. He had ridden for many years previously with Courage Riders. Some of his favorite horses were Abby, Sky, Teddy, Martha, Olaf, Arvid, Tanner and Prince.

His mother Jill shared that the words he consistently said in his life *"Hi", "Happy", "Mom",* and "*Up"* sum up his personality. He loved athletics and in addition to RVR, David also loved skiing with his buddy Bob. A big tumble on the slopes was cause to be *"happy"* even if there was a scrape. He was always *"up"* for a walk, and *"up"* for a boat ride at the cabin, because *"no"* was not part of his vocabulary. Holidays and birthdays were *"happy"* occasions. David greeted everyone with a "*Hi"* and if you were extra special, multiple *"Hi's",* in an outdoor voice. He had a huge smile and deep laugh which was contagious.

Cheryl wrote, *"David was such a joy and inspiration to everyone around him. I fondly remember being David's back-rider support on a few occasions and instructing him before he joined the carriage driving program. I so enjoyed seeing him for his 30th social distanced birthday party this Spring! I will miss his infectious smile!"*

David and RVR instructor Orphy

David and RVR volunteer Kristin

"The more exciting, the better" is how Joan, one of David's teachers and therapeutic riding instructors, described his fun-loving attitude of living life.

Libby shared that she will miss her friend, David. Her memories of their special friendship that started 25 years ago include horseback riding, his *"Hi,"* smile and laugh, his family, and his love for trotting.

One story of how David inspired others involves Kathy Jo. Back in 2006, David gave RVR one of the first gifts for the purchase of land to be the permanent home for RVR. Knowing how important RVR is to our riders is a powerful reason, the central "Why" to achieving our goal of completing the Afton facility and expanding services. Also David inspired her to become a therapeutic driving instructor, to be a part of his joy for RVR's horses and volunteers…and worth repeating, his love for trotting!

His mother Jill, and his sister Anne were devoted to him and devoted their lives to him. David will be greatly missed by them and all the many people he has touched in his life. He was a bright light on this earth. David and his father Jim are together again.

2020 Round-Up Virtual Gala

The 2020 Round-Up Virtual Gala was held November 14th. Cheryl, Tom and Kathy Jo joined emcee Jim Detmar to highlight inspiring stories of our riders and volunteers, this year's accomplishments and plans for the future.

Over 250 of RVR's friends and families participated in the event from the comfort and safety of home. There were over 100 auction items thanks to overwhelming community support.

We are grateful for the participation of our riders Christian, Lilia, Sue, Marco, Katrina and Jackson. During the entertaining "Ask a Therapy Horse" segments our riders and drivers Katie, Addy, Hannah, John, Delaney and Nick asked questions to Miss Pickles and Arvid. And with emcee Jim's assistance, the horses "replied". Special thanks to Elastic and to RVR volunteer and horse owner, Kelly for the beautiful video that was filmed in the Fall of 2019 highlighting the impact of RVR's services. Our organization updates included progress on the Fund the Vision Future Build Plan and 2020 improvements to the Afton lesson site.

The event ended with many heart-felt "thank you" messages from our riders, drivers, volunteers and Board members.

Together we achieved our $60,000 Fund the Vision goal and the special $1,000 matching challenge by an anonymous RVR volunteer. With additional gifts, the total has grown to over $72,000! Thanks to the FS Foundation Matching Grant, the impact of these gifts is doubled! To everyone who supported the Round-Up, THANK YOU SO MUCH!

Missed the event? Watch the recording at www.rivervalleyriders.org/gala. We truly appreciate Stagetime Productions and AV For You's professional assistance for helping us navigate the new "virtual" event world.

Save the date for next year's Round-Up Gala on Saturday, November 13, 2021!

2020 Round-Up Virtual Gala

We are grateful for the generous community support:

A Butchery Shoppe
A Little TLC Massage
All Pro Garage Door Company
Andersen Cabinet, Inc.
AV For You
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2020 Walk-Wheel and Ride-A-Thon

Our 2020 Walk-Wheel & Ride-A-Thon fundraiser was quite different this year, but every bit as exciting and successful!

First, I want to thank everyone who participated and donated to support our ongoing expenses and the varying preparations we are making for resuming lessons in 2021! With your generous support of over $37,000, we exceeded our $30,000 goal! To make this even more exciting the impact of all the donations will be doubled with the FS Foundation Matching Grant!

Secondly, we did conduct the event differently than in past years. We could not gather in a large group, so we created mailings, sent several email communications, encouraged people to participate on their own with a small group of family or friends and extended the event timeframe to the end of September. We received a grand response from all of you with over 100 participants and over 200 donors!

We had many who rode their horses with small groups of friends or walked with their families and friends, and one unique participant was a pet tortoise named "Tortie Maya."

We do not know for sure how the 2021 Walk-Wheel and Ride-A-Thon will be handled, but we do know for sure we will have the event in the Fall of 2021. We hope to be able to gather at Lake Elmo Park Reserve on a specified date, but the event will span the entire month of September. Giving everyone time to gather their donations in support of River Valley Riders. More information will be shared in the Spring of 2021!

Thank you again for a wonderfully successful 2020 Walk-Wheel and Ride-A-Thon event!

We are grateful that you shared many pictures with us!
We miss our riders, drivers and volunteers! Lesson photos from 2019.