



Friends for Tomorrow News

Fall '06

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Our Mission is to enhance the lives of children and young adults facing extraordinary mental and physical challenges through the therapeutic benefits of horseback riding.

SPECIAL OLYMPICS — Celebration and Surprise!

Our competitors this year deserve the highest accolades. Every fall, we travel with students eight years of age and older to Massachusetts Special Olympics. A brief fact finding mission led me to discover that we have in fact competed with our Friends For Tomorrow athletes for the last nine years! It is one of the highlights of the year for athletes, as

numbers of hours under a coach's guidance and with specific goals on which each athlete will be judged. The format of the competition itself is much like Olympic competition, complete with a meticulously developed schedule, formal ceremonies, and all the pomp and circumstance of Olympic Games.



Eleven riders represented FFT in a field of 81 competitors at the Qualifying event held at Ironstone Farm in Andover in September. Seven riders qualified to compete in the State Finals held at Windrush Farm in Boxford. In all, our riders brought home 34 ribbons and 23 medals. The Finals spanned two days this year, in an effort to best accommodate the number of riders this competition has grown to support since the first Equestrian Games in Massachusetts were held in 1998.

We applaud and are so grateful to the hosting farms and the outstanding efforts made by the staff and volunteers who make this day possible for our riders. Barbara DeNitto and Marge Kittredge are two women who have given me such great inspiration and are mentors in the field of therapeutic horseback riding.

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The hard work and training of our athletes is "secretly" ongoing throughout the year, hidden behind the elaborate and creative games developed by our instructors and volunteers. Every activity provides opportunities to implement horsemanship skills, each trail ride presents ways to practice balance and transitions. Upon our return from a brief summer break, we begin our training officially. Athletes are required to have a training schedule and program, centered on a required



The Outside of a Horse is Good for the Inside of a Child



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Wrapped in a crisp breeze sending a confetti of leaves tapping against the window reminds me so clearly of a year ago when I sat to share my thoughts and thanks to all of you for your continuing

support of Friends For Tomorrow. It has been twelve years since I welcomed the first rider into the program, knowing the bond of friendship she shared with a horse would be one unlike any other she had experienced. Like the lull in the ebb and flow of seasons, the rhythm of goals and achievements and the continuing relationships we all nurture at FFT offer comfort, and it is a story I never tire of telling.

I reflect this year on the circular nature of the successes all involved with FFT sustain. All efforts, from the instructors, staff and board members who so enthusiastically support the operation of this program, are given unconditionally to enhance the experiences we offer our riders. Over 3,000 hours are given by more than forty volunteers throughout the year. Imagine the number of smiles and words of encouragement that kind of involvement that generates!

I had a profound experience this fall when I allowed myself to focus more fully on how broad an impact FFT truly has on others. To anyone who has been able to witness first hand the effect of an hour shared between horse and rider, it is clear how deeply that time influences a child's sense of accomplishment. What brings volunteers to this program? What is it that invites a donor to give to Friends For Tomorrow?

An evening spent in the company of a group of volunteers who graciously shared their personal stories of connection with our riders at a recent board meeting affirmed the incredible ways in which every individual involved is in turn both the giver and the receiver.

I learned that while each person drawn in to a relationship with this program did so to offer their services in a voluntary capacity, that each received in turn a "gift" from the children and the families who ride here. Volunteers spoke of unconditional acceptance, trust, and friendship that was felt on both a working level, but also that fed into their own sense of self. I believe we have all learned how much joy we bring to one another, and how

vital it is to recognize that though we may be a service oriented non-profit organization, that our collective experience is one that enriches the lives of many more individuals than our participants alone.

There can be no better goal than continuing to ensure the continued success of our riders, nurturing the relationships and the mutual gifts of friendship and support, and to honor you, our donors, with a future of dedication to this aspiration. Know that my vision of a ride into the sunset will always have the children of Friends For Tomorrow right alongside me, if not leading the way!

My deepest thanks to all who join us on the ride!

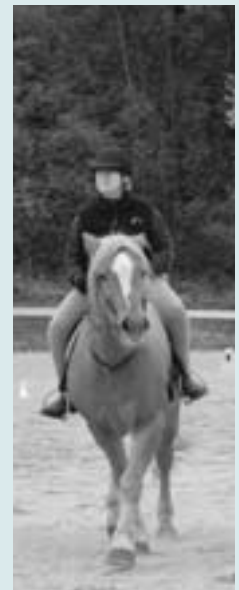
Warmest wishes,

Diane

“Over 3,000 hours are given by more than forty volunteers throughout the year. Imagine the number of smiles and words of encouragement that kind of involvement that generates!”



Special Olympics - The Day in Pictures



From Franny's Mom...

Special Olympics this year was a splendid autumn day in full glory. The sun was bright and the air was crisp, the leaves were golden and some reds were coming through. It was good weather to be victorious, and Francesca had a number of triumphs coming home from two events with a clutch of ribbons to show her family



and friends. She keeps them, along with her medals, on her bulletin board in her room for all to see.

Franny has been riding for a number of years at Friends For Tomorrow. She looks forward to her riding lessons and almost never misses a session. She recently acquired a riding outfit and loves it, and now won't ride without her special clothing. It gives her a feeling of confidence and professionalism.

Franny participated in a Quadrille in the "Friends for Tomorrow" Horse

Show along with three other female riders. She really enjoyed herself and performed with great enthusiasm. One of the great benefits of riding with four girls was the friendships and camaraderie among the other riders that took place. Franny struggles sometimes with her memory and recall, and seeing her friends and talking to them motivated her to come up with their names more quickly and think about special things she wished to say when she saw them. The excitement of seeing her pals helped her to develop the skills she needed to participate more fully in the class.

There was also a lot to remember in the Quadrille from the direction and pace of the horse to the sequence of the movements. All of this was very challenging to Franny. I am sure that if Sue ever doubted she could do it, she never let Franny know. On the other hand, I was dubious about such complicated plan for the riders, let alone the horses. But it all came together beautifully! It turned out that Sue had been planning this for years and had a vision of how it might take place!

We all shared in the dream of making things happen through careful planning and slow deliberation. Sue planned in detail each move the girls made with the horse. She modified and changed things as she went along to meet each rider's strengths. We were all very impressed by this and by the patience of the horses too!

So it is with all our planning for special

needs individuals. You see what he or she wants to achieve, and then must figure out all the steps necessary to make it happen. The challenge is to remain flexible and not be too rigid in our expectations because it will all change. The changes and nuances are a part of the process of discovery and are what make each new thing — from PT to OT to any new skill — effective and meaningful to the individual. But it is hard to be flexible and takes practice. Think of yoga!

Franny is presently going through a rigorous OT and PT schedule as she adjusts to learning to walk without the leg braces she has worn all her life. We are developing some new strategies to increase strength and stability,



which will help her walk better. Her concentration at Gateway, where she works as an artist each day, is not what it could be and so she is working on some OT skills at FFT that will make her more independent in her studio work. Activities at FFT offer an alternative setting in which all these ideals are subtly reinforced through the physical act of horseback riding and the cognitive, social and emotional challenges Franny faces as an emerging independent rider.

Her horseback riding muscles, we learned, are very impressive and the therapy she has had at "Friends" has given her some great core and leg strength. We need to build on that. Diane suggested that we could work with the PT to develop some things Franny can do on the horse to strengthen the muscles she needs to walk. How amazing! Diane anticipated what we needed even before I knew what we needed to ask for! Isn't this what friends are for?! It all evolved in a casual conversation about what was new with our family. Thank you, Diane!

Diane mentioned that she sometimes wonders what happens to the young children she teaches as they grow up and go on with their life. For Francesca, the next big horizon is going to be housing. We have just begun to start looking at placement in various settings. My dream is to start a group home here in Lincoln. Franny would like to remain here and is beginning to feel that she would like to be with her peers rather than live at home. There is still time for this dream to happen. She is happy in her employment and that is more than I can say for many post graduates.

Time is on our side, and I have learned that patience helps too, and it is fun to dream. Dreaming is one of characteristics of being human. So is laughing.

Dream, and laugh; if we don't make the moon maybe we will reach the stars.



Franny & her Mom share a moment as they await a lesson.



Film Features Francesca

This year Francesca was chosen as one of six individuals featured in an annual film called "Our Successes." The film was produced by the Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation which serves thousands of individuals throughout the state. Franny was selected from a pool of 5,000 clients because of all her tremendous accomplishments, **including those she enjoys at FFT!** The video premiered in October at the regional conference for Service Coordinators whose theme this year was "The Pursuit of Happiness." It will also be shown to lawmakers, policy makers, and individuals in the field of human services. Several of her paintings were displayed at the Human Rights Conference at the same time.

Volunteer Thoughts - Alice

For the last year or so that I have been volunteering at Friends For Tomorrow, nothing has brightened my week more than seeing the joy of a child's face when they ride their trustful ponies. As a rider myself, I know how amazing it is to experience the world from the back of a horse, but somehow seeing it in a child makes it seem all the more fantastic.

What is truly magical is the first ride at FFT. I was deeply moved by one of the students, Sanjana, when she had her first ride on Doc. Sanjana is no longer riding with us but in the short time she did I have never been so touched by what I saw.

It was Sanjana's first lesson. She was a beautiful girl who did not speak but when she threw her arms around Doc for the first time, her face said it all. She moved her hands over his body, feeling his warmth and strength, and she broke out a huge smile which rivaled the teeth on those gum commercials. That smile remained throughout the entire lesson. On his back, Sanjana loved to feel Doc's

name and tug her fingers through it.

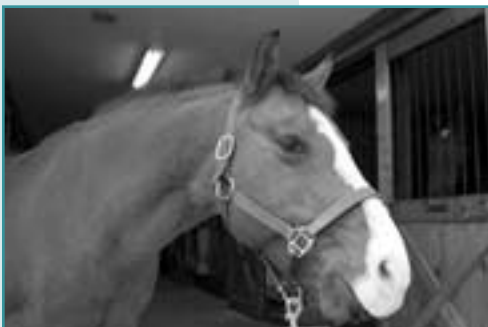
Every so often, she would lean down against his neck and wrap her delicate arms around his moving shoulders with her eyes gently closed. When Sanjana did this she could feel what it was like to be able to move freely and on her own. As she did, Doc would perk his ears back ever so slightly, listening to her, and would take smaller and slower steps to ensure her safety upon him, for he knew how fragile she was.

As the lesson progressed, Sanjana became more and more attached to Doc. She had wonderful balance and when she wasn't on Doc's neck, she observed the world from this new level. At one point, Sanjana looked down at me and our eyes locked. Her soft, brown eyes had a deep gaze of thanks and in this moment I felt something



pass through me which to this day I cannot explain. When she finally had to step down from him, she reflected a state of pure happiness. Back in the barn Sanjana flung her arms back around Doc and buried her face in his comforting fur, giving him a kiss on his neck as her fingers wound their way back into his mane. Because of Doc, Sanjana had been able to walk the world without having to rely on anyone else. Her soul and Doc's had become one during that lesson. And as she walked out of the barn with a dreamy spring in her step, I knew. Sanjana had found her wings.

FFT's Newest Friend—Meet Shorty!



true "caretaker" of our riders. He is a rich milk chocolate color, with soft eyes that welcome a pat on the muzzle. A large pony with a strong build, he is versatile for both small and large riders, yet is a comfortable height for our sidewalkers as they travel alongside the students. Shorty has proven himself to fit a VERY large need, and we look forward to a long friendship!

Coldbrook Farm's stable mate Shorty has been eagerly welcomed in to the FFT family! Jen Churchill lovingly spends many hours finding the "just-right" horses for many of her own clients. We have been blessed with her commitment to finding one who is also a match for our riders! In Shorty, we have the perfect fit. At 18 years young, he is a



The young "Prince" now five months old, charms us with his affection and curiosity.

Out and About

The Sean McDonough Foundation invited Friends For Tomorrow to speak at a recent gala event held in Boston on September 17th. Our job was to offer thanks to the donors who enabled the foundation to generously support more than 50 children's charities throughout New England. Yes, FFT is one of them! A room filled with hundreds of people watched as images of our riders faded in and out on a huge wall sized screen, listening intently as I shared in as few words as I could possibly manage, the resonant story of our children. It is an evening I will never forget. Knowing the eyes looking up towards the screen were glistening because of the stories about our children was a testament, once again, to the power of relationship between horse and rider.

We deeply appreciate the opportunity given to us to help such a large audience learn about the work we do. Additionally, we have had the honor of speaking to the Middlesex Savings Bank, Middlesex Savings

Charitable Foundation, The Rotary Club of Concord, and have been included in several video projects, most recently with Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation (Mass DMR) and Ronald McDonald Charities.

We are so grateful to the many foundations and organizations who have provided funding in support of our program during the last twelve months:

- The May Foundation
- The DeMoulas Foundation
- The Bailey Family Foundation
- Ronald McDonald Charities
- Middlesex Savings Charitable Foundation
- The Sean McDonough Foundation
- Nashawtuc Charities and Bank of America

Friends For Tomorrow may be seen in the upcoming special "The Sean McDonough Charitable Foundation Celebrity Golf Classic Television Special" filmed for Fox Sports New England Network. It will be aired six times between Friday, November 17th and Saturday, December 9 on FSN. For more information, go to seanmcdonoughfoundation.org.

The hard work and training of our athletes is "secretly" ongoing throughout the year, hidden behind the elaborate and creative games developed by our instructors and volunteers.

Special Olympics

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their respective programs, give riders from more than 10 programs a day cherished by the athletes, their families, and the volunteers who feel such pride and joy in the students' accomplishments.

We hope the pictures throughout our newsletter allow you, in some small way, to experience the thrill of an athletic competition uniquely designed to bring out the best in every individual's abilities, and which inherently brings out the finest in all who participate.

On Their Own!!



Nick & Danny surprised us all by leaving their walkers behind as they made their grand entrance during the opening ceremonies. Here they are celebrating independence with the help of FFT volunteer Scott.

Friends for Tomorrow, Inc.



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