

# Naples Equestrian Challenge offers hope and horsemanship for families living with physical and emotional disabilities

In its 18th year serving our community, Naples Equestrian Challenge (NEC) offers vital equine-assisted activities and therapy programs to help families living with a broad range of physical and emotional disabilities in Collier County.

"No two of our riders or participants live with the exact same set of challenges. However, through our equine therapy programs, we are able to help each one grow and improve individually," said Kim Minarich, executive director of NEC.

home and at school. Riders experience increased confidence and communication through their interaction with other riders, instructors and of course the horse.

Additionally, horseback riding moves the rider's body in a rhythmic manner similar to a human gait so riders with physical disabilities often show improvement in flexibility, balance and muscle strength.

## *Equine Facilitated Learning (EFL)*

NEC offers its EFL program providing

and riding the horses. Through multi-week sessions, participants progress through learning activities designed to enhance self awareness and correct negative behavior feelings and attitudes.

Riders and participants at NEC are referred to the program by a variety of sources such as medical doctors, physical therapists, counselors and even other participating families. The common need is that each one is looking for an improved quality of life.



## *Not just horsing around*

Naples Equestrian Challenge provides vital equine therapeutic programs incorporating therapeutic riding, equine facilitated learning (EFL) and equine facilitated psychotherapy (EFP).

### *Therapeutic Riding*

PATH (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship) Certified instructors develop customized riding programs for riders to develop cognitive, physical, emotional and social well-being. The physical, emotional and psychological impacts can be seen in the arena, at

an experiential approach to teaching and learning, with the help of horses. In equine-facilitated experiential learning, participants interact with the horse, the environment, with one another, and with their instructors to learn about a wide range of topics and self-discovery.

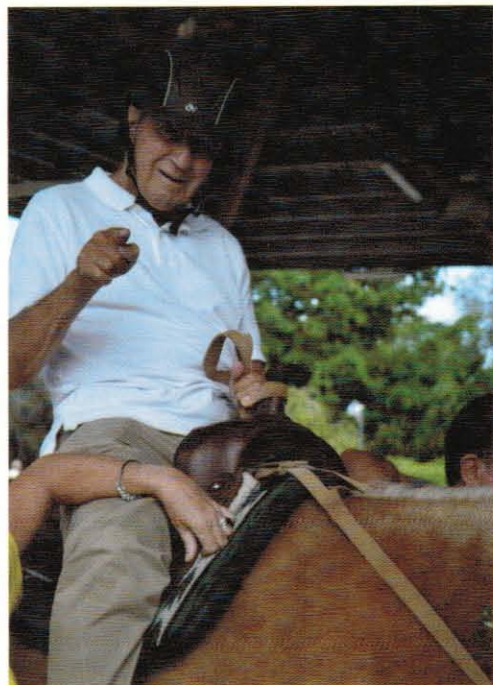
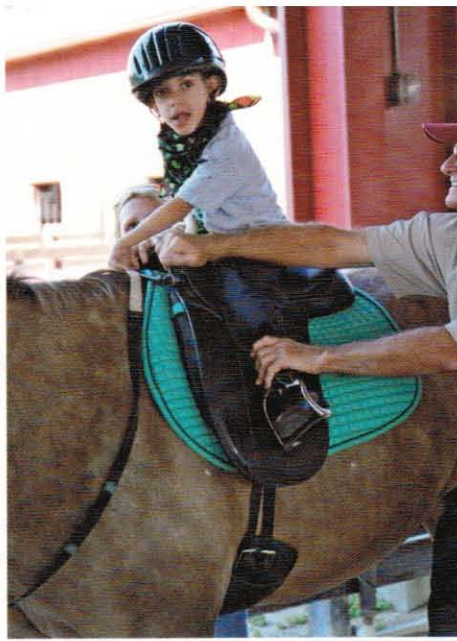
### *Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy (EFP)*

With equine facilitated psychotherapy, participants work with a PATH Certified Equine Specialist and a clinical psychotherapist on activities such as groundwork activities with the horses as well as handling, grooming,

## *Personal Achievements are the Greatest Success*

Sometimes the results are visibly noticeable as with rider Zach Aldridge who is living with the effects of shaken baby syndrome. Six years ago, Zach came to NEC at the age of four unable to walk because of paralysis and hip dysplasia. Therapeutic riding and the natural rhythm of the horse's gait gently rocked his hip back into place and improved his muscle tone, allowing Zach to finally walk on his own.

Many times, the results are felt more deeply by participants dealing with



the emotional impacts of diseases such as Parkinson's disease. Symptoms of Parkinson's disease vary greatly from shaking,

difficulty with walking, movement and coordination. As the disease progresses, it can take a heavy emotional toll by isolating patients from their normal life and removing their independence. Through equine facilitated learning, local Parkinson's patients have been able to regain a sense of balance - both physically and emotionally through the social interaction with other participants and instructors.

"It is so rewarding to see our riders and participants progress through the program, achieving their own personal successes," said Minarich.

In April, Naples Equestrian Challenge's hundreds of riders, participants, family members, friends, and volunteers will celebrate the year's successes at the annual Spring Horseshow. Alongside their NEC friends, riders demonstrated their horsemanship and developmental skills while navigating a customized obstacle course.



## Save the Date

**for the NEC's annual Kentucky Derby Party and Fundraiser on Saturday May 4th!**

Call 239.596.2988 for tickets or sponsorship information.

Through donations, Naples Equestrian Challenge offers therapy riding for a nominal, subsidized fee. No rider is ever turned away for an inability to pay.

Each rider is assisted by three volunteers - a "leader" that controls the horse and two "side-walkers" that assist in the therapeutic activities and provide physical support.

NEC has been named one of PATH International's "Premier Centers" for maintaining the industry's best practices in therapy and barn management.

All of the riding instructors at NEC are independently trained and certified through PATH International.

### About Naples Equestrian Challenge

Naples Equestrian Challenge, Inc. is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization with the mission to improve the lives of children and adults with special needs through therapeutic riding and other equine-related programs. With a dedicated staff and volunteers, Naples Equestrian Challenge provides therapeutic riding programs to 430 participants per year. Through donations and sponsorships, the organization is able to provide this vital therapy to those who need the service most, regardless of income level. The therapeutic riding programs offered at Naples Equestrian Challenge foster growth and confidence, empowering riders living with cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, stroke, autism spectrum disorder, amputations, spina bifida, spinal cord injuries, multiple sclerosis and a range of emotional, learning and developmental disabilities. For more information on programs or volunteer opportunities, visit [www.NaplesEquestrianChallenge.org](http://www.NaplesEquestrianChallenge.org).

Naples Equestrian Challenge is a proud partner of: Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH)

The Naples Children and Education Foundation

United Way of Collier County