

Naples Equestrian Challenge plans equine therapy center

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(Photo: Special to The News-Press)

Work will begin this summer on the new Equine Therapy Center that the Naples Equestrian Challenge is building in Naples.

NEC has raised more than \$1.3 million during its Barn Raising Capital Campaign, enough to break ground on the center. The center will expand NEC's capacity to provide therapeutic riding and other equine-related programs to children and adults with special needs.

The new center will be built on land just south of and adjacent to NEC's current site at 206 Ridge Drive. The parcel was purchased debt-free last year with the help of a Community Development Block Grant and a generous donation from Connie and Gary Sharpe, longtime supporters of the organization.

The center was designed pro bono by Humphrey Rosal Architects and will feature an 80-foot covered round riding arena, a 4,000-square-foot training and research center and a new stable that will accommodate up to four therapy horses. A bridle path for exercising NEC's entire herd will wrap around the perimeter of the facility.

D. Garrett Construction donated time to prepare the project's development budget.

"The new therapy center will allow us to serve at least 200 additional special riders annually and to be part of the growing research into the medical virtues of equine-assisted therapy," said Kim Minarich, NEC's executive director.

Naples Equestrian Challenge supporters commemorated the milestone with a special ceremony Jan. 21 honoring Groundbreaking Donors Don and Connie Smith.

"This time last year we set the goal of raising five million dollars to build and support a new Equine Therapy Center," Minarich said. "We still have a long way to go, but thanks to the generosity of Don and Connie, along with the support of our Lifetime Legacy and capital campaign donors, we can begin comprehensive site work early this summer."

Established in 1995, Naples Equestrian Challenge has grown dramatically over the last two decades due in part to an increase in referrals from pediatricians, neurologists and physical therapists who are recommending equine-assisted therapy for their patients.

The organization, a Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH) Premier Accredited Center, provides therapeutic riding and other equine-assisted activities and therapy programs to more than 550 participants each year.

"Individuals from age two to 82 have overcome many physical and mental challenges at NEC, learning or relearning how to walk, talk, socialize and live more fully," Minarich said.

To make a contribution or learn more, contact Minarich at 239-596-2988 or visit NaplesEquestrianChallenge.org.

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