



Nickers & News

Summer 2024



Message from the Chair

Susan Kish, Board Chair, Free Rein Center

Happy Summer to all! We at Free Rein Center hope you and your families are having a healthy, happy time in this warm weather.

In this column I would like to discuss something that is dear to my heart – Free Rein Center’s Mission. Since I have been Chair, I have tried to emphasize how important our Mission Statement is not only to those who are learning about us but also each of us that go about our “Free Rein” day. This statement is why this organization exists and should be on our minds and lips often. It is not just a saying – it is our daily reason for being; it is practiced by each of us connected with Free Rein whether as a student, a volunteer, a staff member or even as an equine partner.

Our Mission is: To serve the community by strengthening the spirits, minds, and bodies of children and adults through interaction with horses.

So how does this statement embody what Free Rein Center does? First, Free Rein is all about serving the community. We are a non-profit started because 24 years ago some very civic minded individuals saw a need to help those with challenges in their lives. They also understood how positive physically, cognitively, and emotionally being with a horse can be. Those of us currently involved in the Free Rein Center are answering that same call to serve the community.

When we say we are in “low spirits” what are we really saying? We do not feel good about ourselves; perhaps we feel we are unaccomplished; we do not “fit in;” we are stagnant with no way to lift ourselves out of hopelessness. Some of our students physically struggle to hold themselves upright and others have trouble processing directions and some are emotionally overwhelmed and frightened. All are conditions which can result in low self-esteem. The

Free Rein Center gives a student an opportunity to achieve a sense of mastery, even if it a small gain. Working with the horses, either by riding or through ground horsemanship, promotes confidence and increased coping skills. “The unconditional acceptance and support provided by horses can also boost self-esteem and foster a positive self-image.” (www.silvermoor.com/the-therapeutic-benefits-of-horses-and-horse-riding-for-neurodivergent-individuals Feb. 2024).

Anyone who has spent time with a horse knows one has to be “in the moment” without a mind wandering to other matters. Horse connections strengthen our ability to concentrate. The walk of a horse is soothing both to body and to the mind and helps to regulate sensory input and promote relaxation. Our mind becomes regulated and calm so that it can process thoughts more confidently. Our students must use their minds to accomplish new skills. That whole process builds the groundwork for more success. Several recent studies have hypothesized that therapeutic riding promotes improvement in neurodivergent individuals in areas of language and cognition following that form of intervention.

Most of our students have physical issues that can be addressed by therapeutic riding. The gait of a horse engages the entire body. With the help of our side walkers, students work on their ability to balance which improves their muscle strength. We have had students, who when they began our program, were unable to sit up on the horse without help. Today they



require much less help from the side walkers. Equine therapy promotes coordination and positive results with fine and gross motor skills. The horse's movement encourages increased spatial awareness and body control.

Each day at the Free Rein Center our work with students supports and emphasizes our Mission

Statement. We think it is a good goal to have. Inside this newsletter you will read about some sad times, some happy times and about lots of hard work which is being done to serve your community. The Free Rein Center will re-open in the Fall ready to continue with Horses Helping Humans Heal.

Program Update

In 2024, we served 156 participants, including our local school groups, TVS, and private individuals. Free Rein has achieved this with fourteen equine instructors, 93 volunteers and 5 staff members. We continue to offer a six-week session, then a four-week session.

We also reach out to various organizations throughout our community to provide ground school programs. These programs build knowledge of caring and working with horses, learning horse behavior, understanding herd dynamics and communicating effectively with our equine partners. The session length to serve more clients is still a necessity, as our program continues to grow, and individuals seek our services.

We continue to have great success with our Little Hooves Touching Hearts program. Phoebe, our mini-horse, and Zoey, our Welsh pony, continued to go into adult facilities to visit residents. The visits have been a huge success. Since January, we have made six onsite visits to various care centers and educational settings. Each visit averaged 25-30 participants. Sadly, with the loss of Phoebe we had to postpone several scheduled events. We were fortunate to acquire Jolene, a miniature horse from a local private farm. Jolene will fulfill Phoebe's legacy by providing rescheduled and future visits in the Fall.

We are excited to be finalizing a Horsin' Around Stem program with Girl Scouts Carolinas Peaks to Piedmont. As our programs continue to grow, we look forward to supporting our community!



Free Rein Staff

Brittany McCathern,
Program Director

Roberta Brownlee, Office Manager

Parker Moore,

Horse Care Coordinator

Kara Franks, Instructor

Toni Garrett, Instructor

Mary Stoehr, Instructor

Free Rein's Mission is to serve the community by strengthening the spirits, minds and bodies of children and adults through interaction with horses.

Free Rein's Vision is to provide interactive horse-human experiences to an inclusive community which enrich life skills, promote personal well-being and build lasting relationships.

Free Rein's Values

We offer a positive experiential, collaborative environment that heals and cares for our community, participants and horses through mutual respect, positive atmosphere and personal growth.

Losses

As some of you may already know, there was a devastating blow to Free Rein's herd this spring.

In the early hours of Tuesday morning, April 30th, Phoebe gained her wings and cantered across the Rainbow Bridge.

She was diagnosed with anaplasmosis, a tick borne illness, which had caused her to not feel her best. After spending a few days at the vet, she came back home and had seemed to perk up. Monday afternoon she started not feeling well again and began running a fever. The decision was made to take her over to the University of Tennessee to see how to help her. After being there for a few hours, it became clear that her pain was almost unmanageable when she began showing signs of colic and nothing was making her comfortable. After an ultrasound, it was revealed that her colon was very enlarged and she was also dehydrated despite being on fluids.

Given her condition and the fact that surgery was not an option for her, the heart wrenching decision was made to end her suffering. We are so thankful for all the prayers and support that we received during this time and we want to extend our sincerest thank you to Jacleen for giving us this wonderful opportunity to love Phoebe and the gift of watching her touch lives in the short amount of time that we had with her.



Tuesday afternoon, we also said our goodbyes to Toby.

As most know, Toby had retired up to SugarBrush Farm last fall where he was reunited with former herd member Cassie a few weeks before her passing and then joined a couple months later by Tonka so they could live out their golden years together. Unfortunately, that end came when Toby presented with signs of colic that afternoon. The vet was called when he did not seem to feel better after at home colic treatment and it quickly became evident that it was more than it seemed at first glance. His red blood cells were not where they should have been on his bloodwork and he was beginning to turn jaundiced. The exam revealed a displacement in his intestines and, given his age and the other things going on, he was not a candidate for surgery so the decision was made to relieve his suffering and also send him across the Rainbow Bridge.

We are truly heartbroken, as this was so sudden, but so grateful to Pebbles for allowing us to love and care for Toby as part of Free Rein's herd for the last few years and to have been blessed to know such an amazing creature and be part of his journey here and also to the SugarBrush Farm crew: Carter, Sue, Jody and Amberly, for loving Toby so well in his last few months. He brought such joy to all who knew him and he will be greatly missed.



Meet the Herd



Jolene

We are delighted to welcome Jolene, an 8-year-old miniature horse, to our herd. Connie Chase has been a long-time Free Rein volunteer and originally purchased Jolene from a rescue organization in Eastern North Carolina. Connie was looking for a mini that could help her grandson learn to ride and act as a companion for her other horse. Jolene was originally advertised as well-trained in pulling carts and great for small children learning how to ride. However, when Connie drove to pick her up, she immediately realized that her background was misrepresented. Jolene was in a pasture with other minis and donkeys but was very difficult to catch and did not know how to walk on a lead line. After driving four hours, Connie still decided to bring her home. Over a year, Connie devoted her time to training Jolene how to wear

saddles, walk on a lead line, and so much more. Eventually Connie's grandson needed a larger horse and Jackie O had made a Facebook post looking for miniature horses. Jolene was then rehomed with Jackie, where she stayed until Brittany visited the farm on other business. Brittany saw Jolene, then asked if that was Connie's old mini to which Jackie replied yes. Jackie then proceeded to show Brittany how Jolene could kiss on command, and she immediately knew that we needed her for Free Rein to help fill the void Phoebe's loss created. It was agreed by all that this introduction to Jolene was no coincidence; indeed it was simply supposed to happen.



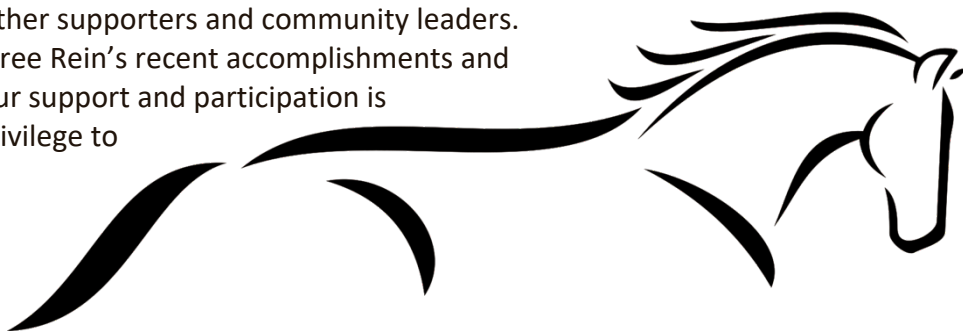
Save the Date!

We are excited to let you know about our upcoming gala, **The Mane Event: Horses Helping Humans Heal**, which will be held on October 19, 2024 at Connestee Falls Clubhouse in Brevard. This special event is our largest fundraiser and allows us the chance to come together and celebrate the impact Free Rein makes in our community. We would be honored to have your presence.

The Mane Event: Horses Helping Humans Heal, will feature silent and live auctions offering the opportunity to help Fund Our Herd, which is the heart and soul of our program. We are also featuring incredible adventures such as a Luxury Charleston Getaway, a Nashville Unplugged Trip, a Tennessee Whiskey Adventure Trip, a Greystone Inn Getaway, and wonderful items donated by our generous local business sponsors. The evening will be a great opportunity for you to connect with other supporters and community leaders.

We are delighted to share some of Free Rein's recent accomplishments and some of our future plans with you. Your support and participation is crucial to our success. It would be a privilege to have you join us for an evening of fun, celebration, and support.

We look forward to sharing this memorable event with you.



Youth Spotlight

Avery Moore

I first started coming to Free Rein thanks to my mom. She had started volunteering, and I would always hear her talk about what a great time she was having, so I decided to start coming with her when I was home from school on breaks. I had a lot of fun volunteering and learning more about horses, but I couldn't be there as frequently as I wished I could be because of school. Once I heard about Rockbrook, I thought it would be the perfect opportunity to continue working with the horses on a more consistent basis over the summer. A positive experience I've had at both Free Rein and Rockbrook has been how helpful and kind everyone is! Before I started volunteering, I didn't really have any experience working with horses, but everyone I've worked/volunteered with has been super helpful answering all my questions and teaching me everything I need to know!

Riley Moore

My mom introduced me to Free Rein. She had been volunteering for a couple of months and offered for me to go with her. I liked it a lot and wanted to keep working with them. That's how I was led to Rockbrook. The people that work at both Free Rein and Rockbrook are very dedicated and hard working. Taking care of the horses is pretty fun to me.

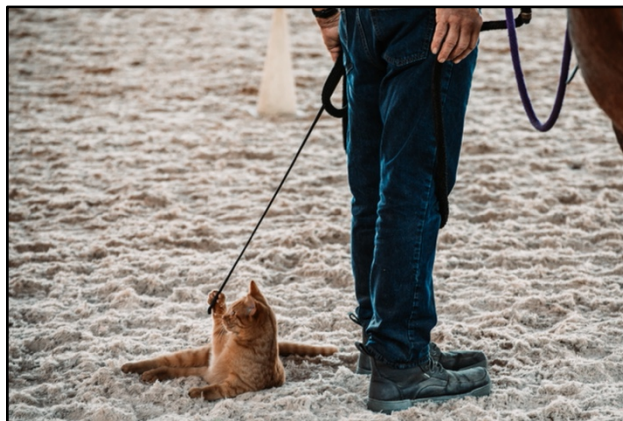
Tessa Walker

Yeah! My mom had wanted me to get back to interacting with horses, and I didn't want to be at a

barn close to my home so I looked farther out and came across Free Rein. I looked at the website and decided it was the place I needed to be at, so I emailed Roberta and I started volunteering. I really enjoyed coming out every other week to be around horses and like-minded people, everyone is so welcoming and kind, put me at ease pretty quick. As I was volunteering, Parker had asked if I wanted to be an instructor for the summer camp, Rockbrook, and I said yes! She and Roberta put in a good word for me to Laura and after my interview with her, I was hired! I have really enjoyed working with this crew and learning more and more about teaching and horses in general. This environment is absolutely outstanding and radiates positivity. I absolutely love working here!

Chloe Curro

I was involved with Davidson River School because of mental health issues. I started going to Free Rein riding center every Wednesday with my school, and loved it! Once I heard that a job was available in the summer time for Rockbrook camp, I immediately wanted to do it. The people that ran Free Rein like Brittany, made me feel safe, understood, and confident. My experience working at camp has been the best months of my life, and my coworkers are my family. I love every one of them with all my heart, and I hope to work many more summers with them! Camp changed my life for the better, and I can truly say I have grown as a person over the past months.





Skip, Zip and Ayla
making our hearts
smile!



6

K

Horsebox Vehicle Makes Transporting Horses More Flexible

With the acquisition of a mini-horse, Free Rein began to take the mini and our Welsh pony to adult care facilities in our community and neighboring communities to assess interest in an equine-based wellness program. The response had been overwhelmingly positive from both the residents and the staff at the facilities. The enthusiasm expressed through increased scheduling of these adult facility wellness visits led Free Rein to evaluate the need for better transportation that was actually owned by the organization.



The purpose of the van is the safe transport of our equine partners large and small. Free Rein was relying on our program director and her PERSONAL equipment to transport. It is difficult and unsafe to have someone unfamiliar with trucks and trailers hauling a horse, so the responsibility fell entirely on Brittany McCathern. Should our director

and/or her personal equipment not be available, a situation with one of our equine partners could be fatal. Free Rein wished to be able to transport any of our horses in case of emergency or to off-campus programming. The trailer that was used for transporting our “littles” proved to be problematic because it was designed for larger horses. Our desire was to obtain a high-profile van which is fitted for small horses but can have those fittings removed for an emergency transport of a regular sized horse.

Free Rein began this past spring to look for an appropriate vehicle. It was determined that a “horsebox” vehicle was ideal. It can accommodate several ways to transport large and small horses. The vehicle is rarely seen in the States but is used often in Europe. Free Rein was fortunate to find an owner who had meticulously cared for her horsebox. She wanted it to go to a place that would use it appropriately. We contacted her and she became familiar with Free Rein through our discussion about our mission, our video and website.

We feel blessed that she was so wonderful to work with and even delivered the vehicle to us herself. Through the kindness and generosity of our donors, Free Rein was able to purchase the Ram horsebox without touching or any manipulation of our current budget.

2023 Board of Directors

Susan Kish, Board Chair
Andy Bullwinkel, Vice Chair
Connie Edmands, Secretary
Jim Garrett, Treasurer
John Colflesh
Leslie Cooperman
Linda Felderhoff
Melodi Horni
Tamika Hunter
Porsha Smith
Carter Heyward, Director Emeritus

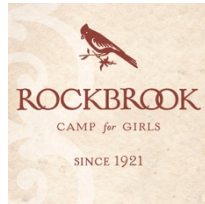
How You Can Help Free Rein

Free Rein counts on the generosity of our business sponsors and individual donors to fund our organization. The money goes to keeping our horses healthy and our riding programs affordable for families. Help us continue to serve the community by becoming a donor. You can sponsor a horse through our HEROS program or make a one-time or continuing contribution. Visit our website, www.freereincenter.org, to learn more, or call our office at 828-883-3375. Free Rein Center is an IRS-approved not-for-profit organization. Our tax ID number is 31-1740563. Thank you for your consideration.

Path Int’l (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International) is a federally registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit, formed in 1969 to promote safety and optimal outcomes in equine-assisted activities and therapies for individuals with special needs. Free Rein has been a PATH Certified Center since 2001.

Thank you to all our sponsors and donors for supporting Free Rein.
Without you we could not do the work of changing lives, one hoof beat at a time.

Diamond Level



Gold Level



Silver Level



Copper Level

