



# HANDI-RIDERS

Volume 1, Issue 4 October 2009

## HANDI-RIDERS of NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

P.O. Box 1855  
Chico, CA 95927  
Phone & Fax: (530) 533-5333  
www.handi-riders.org  
Handiriders@foothill.net

### STAFF

Danny Cuneo  
Executive Director,  
Instructor

Sid McBride  
Program Coordinator,  
Head Instructor

Chris Latouche  
Horse Manager,  
Co-Head Instructor

Catherine Brazil  
Instructor & OTR/L

Kara Curry  
Instructor

Suzanne Bernard  
Volunteer Coordinator

### BOARD of DIRECTORS

Yves Latouche  
Katherine Thomas  
Sid McBride  
Roxana Hodges

## Twenty-Eight Years of Dedication: Farewell to our founders

After twenty-eight years of leadership and dedication, Anthony "Tony" Holochwost Jr. and his wife Freddie have resigned from their positions at Handi-Riders.

Tony and Freddie, the original founders, established a pilot program in 1981 that produced the program we know today as Handi-Riders. Since that time, Tony has been Executive Director and Freddie, President of the Board. Together they have managed countless crucial administrative aspects of Handi-Riders. Through their dedication, the Holochwosts advanced the program from a small pilot program serving a handful of students to a non-profit, and NARHA Premier Accredited center; a defining characteristic of the Holochwosts' legacy was their warm, down-home approach to the program. Their dedication and wealth of knowledge will be greatly missed.

In their absence, Danny Cuneo has assumed the role of Executive Director, and Yves Latouche will assume the role of interim Board President. While we will miss Tony and Freddie's leadership in the program, Handi-Riders welcomes fresh new perspectives, and the opportunity to begin a new chapter in the history of the program.

*See Calendar of events for details of a farewell gathering to honor Tony & Freddie.*



## Please Welcome....Kara Curry!



It is with great pleasure that Handi-Riders announces the newest member of our instructional team, Kara Curry. During the end of August, after many hours of student instructing and riding, Kara traveled to Colorado to complete the final segments of NARHA's instructor certification process, including a class-room instructor training course, and a live test of her riding and teaching abilities in front of NARHA's panel of evaluators.

Kara brings a level of enthusiasm, skill and compassion that motivates and reassures riders, allowing them to progress their riding skills and confidence. We feel privileged to count her among our instructional staff. Welcome, Kara!

## October is National Sensory Awareness Month

According to the Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) Foundation (Previously the KID Foundation), it is estimated that 1 in 20 or 5% of individuals are affected by SPD. For these individuals, there is a glitch in the way they perceive, organize/interpret and/or respond to sensory information, and therefore have difficulty responding in a meaningful or appropriate way. Sensory input that the average person perceives as neutral, may be overwhelming or go unnoticed by the person with SPD; they may seek out sensory input with unusual intensity or feel bombarded. Individuals with SPD are often labeled as clumsy, floppy, spacey, overly sensitive or hyperactive.

In 2008, in an attempt to increase public awareness of the needs of those with SPD, the founders of SI Focus Magazine and the SPD Foundation established October as National Sensory Awareness Month. October was selected in light of Halloween, a sensory intensive holiday. While many children view Halloween as a pleasurable holiday filled with suspense and fun, the experience can pose a great challenge for the child with SPD.

### *Samples of problematic sensory experiences or challenges associated with Halloween activities, may include...*

- For those with **tactile** aversions or sensitivities: itchy costumes, face paint, different party games (worms in a bowl, bobbing for apples, etc), being bumped and jostled by other participants, textures of different candies
- For those with **visual or auditory** aversions or sensitivities: bright, sudden/ unsuspected lights or noises (screeching, crackles, slamming doors, increased noise levels) or costume accessories and props
- For those with **vestibular** (balance & movement) aversions or sensitivities or **depth perception** issues: the challenge of navigating curbs or steps, especially with decreased lighting
- For those who **need greater intensity** of sensory input (sensory seekers) or who have poor body awareness: having to wait their turn and slow down, and not bumping into others

*“One in twenty, or 5% of individuals are affected by SPD...there is a glitch in the way they perceive, organize/ interpret and/or respond to sensory information.”*



### *General strategies to support those with SPD during the Halloween holiday:*

- Utilize snug undergarments (stretch pants or snug shirts under costumes), and provide frequent squeezes or hugs
- Have the child wear a back-pack and frequently empty candy into a centrally positioned back-pack for added weight (monitor for excessive weight)
- Pack fidgets in their bags (small squeeze toys from a discount store)
- Use masks on a stick that can be held, rather than face paint
- Trick-or-treat before or after the big rush, preferably by or before dusk to lessen the intensity of decorative lighting methods and provide better visibility for those with depth perception issues
- Provide headphones with white noise or other soothing sounds
- Host a sensory smart party with soothing music, games such as mummy (wrapping snugly in a blanket), tug-of-war, bean-bag toss into different forms (pumpkin board with mouth cut out as hole), or provide chewy treats (fruit leather, gummy bears, jerky, etc) and sucking thick liquids through a straw (apple-sauce, fruit smoothies, yogurt, etc)

## Funding Changes Reflect Overwhelming Program Support

In early August, amidst a struggling economy, Handi-Riders received notification that its primary funding source, Far Northern Regional Center, would not be providing authorizations or funding for services. This change comes following the enactment of new state legislation. According to the California Health and Human Services Agency, Department of Developmental Services, current Trailer Bill Language states that Regional Centers must temporarily suspend funding for services considered social-recreation, specialized recreation and non-medical therapies.

Far Northern Regional Center clients make up more than 75% of our participating riders. Without their involvement, our class sizes would dwindle, leaving Handi-Riders to make significant changes to its offered program and services. Handi-Riders does serve other, non-Regional Center clients, namely those who do not have developmental disability-based diagnoses (as required by the Regional Center), but who still have some special needs or at-risk predisposition such as a psychosocial or behavioral-health need. However, the percentage of the additional riders has historically been significantly less than that of our Regional Center participants.

Fortunately, an overwhelming number of parents support their child's continued participation in our program, citing the overall wellness their child has gained since participating. What had the potential to be a period of bleak

enrollment, has turned out to reflect overwhelming parent support for our services. According to Handi-Riders' Program Coordinator, Sid McBride, parents are willing to pay out of pocket to enable their child's continued participation during these rough economic times.

Handi-Riders would like to extend its unending appreciation to those families and organizations who continue to support our practice of Equine-Assisted Activities during these rough times. Such support will ensure the program's continued existence for our current clients and those yet to come. Thank you!

### Volunteers Needed for the Fall Session:

Classes are currently underway, but we are continually looking for volunteers both for regularly scheduled commitments, as well as substitutes. No experience necessary. For more information or to sign up, please contact our volunteer coordinator,

Suzanne Bernard at

533-5333 OR 877-2749 OR

handiridersvolunteers@comcast.net

Come join our team and make a difference!

## Save the Date

October 2009-December 2009

- **October 2009**

Saturday, October 17th

HR at Camelot Equestrian

Center: Event Demo

Saturday, October 24th

Fundraiser: Rib Cook-off

Thursday, October 29th

FREE Sensory Awareness

Talk

- **November 2009**

Saturday, November 7th

Fall Session Ends

Sunday, November 8th

Farewell gathering for

Tony & Freddie 1-4 PM

Winter Break

*Call for event details: 533-5333*

## Trying Something New: Durham Equestrian Play-Day

Saturday, August 8th, six of our Handi-Rider students participated in an equestrian playday, hosted by the Butte County Sheriff's Mounted Posse at Durham Park. Each rider had the opportunity to participate in each of eight events.

For most of our riders, this was their first time in a competitive equestrian event; the countless smiles indicated that it was a great first experience. Heather, Joy and Neo entered the arena atop two of our newest mounts, Tucker and Shasta. Both the horses were extra spunky and eager to strut their stuff. Shasta, the newest member of the herd, was surprisingly quiet and composed, even allowing her two riders to practice some more active steering with her slower, more controlled pace.

All our riders were extremely patient, waiting their turn at each event over a span of five hours. One parent commented that her child held it together considerably well, given the prolonged nature of the event. Another parent commented that she was so proud of her child for trying something new amidst so many variables.



The experience also provided our riders an extra opportunity to learn about or practice horse-handling skills. Jessie helped lead her horse Pepe to warm him up, while Andrew observed and learned the value of lunging a horse before riding.

Each rider experienced a different thrill. For some, it was the unique experience of competing and the allure of many ribbons; for others, it was the sheer speed of our usually lazy mounts and the chance to ride a new or different horse. Janet expressed her pleasure by breaking into delighted laughter as she approached the finish line.

The partner events provided our riders the challenge of problem-solving and strategizing, including which horse would be best on the home stretch, or which rider needed to adjust his/her speed to stay together with the partner's horse.

Overall, the event provided our riders a greater perspective of the opportunities available to the equestrian community. There's more to riding than walk, trot, whoa and steering; you put it all together and a lot of fun follows!

Many thanks to our extremely dedicated team of volunteers who made this event possible. Special thanks to Laura Bruns, Sue Scott, Michelle Boyd and Roxanna Hodges who came out Friday to help prepare the horses for the play-day.



## Farewell to An Equine Friend



At the wise age of 29, after four and a half years of dedicated service, Chett will be entering retirement. He was best known for his versatility, easily transitioning from an active lead-walker and a passive passenger to an emerging independent rider, transitioning off the lead-rope. His slow trot and dependable nature made him a favorite for riders, volunteers and instructors alike. His background in the show arena provided him with a heightened sensitivity for leg and rein aids, allowing him to respond to the natural aids of our more advanced riders. Chett has been the only remaining horse since our relocation to our current facility.