



# HANDI-RIDERS

Volume 3, Issue 4, October 2011

## HANDI-RIDERS of NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

P.O. Box 1885  
Chico, CA 95927  
Phone/Fax; (530) 533-5333  
<http://www.handi-riders.org>  
[handiriders@foothill.net](mailto:handiriders@foothill.net)

### STAFF

Suzanne Bernard  
*Executive Director*

Sid McBride  
*Program Coordinator*

Meghan Estes  
*Volunteer Coordinator*

Chris Latouche  
*Head Instructor &  
Horse Manager*

Danny Cuneo  
*Instructor &  
Equine Specialist*

Catherine Brazil  
*Instructor & OTR/L*

Alissa Burns  
*Instructor*

Kara Curry Huffman  
*Instructor*

### BOARD OFFICERS

Bob Baylor  
Sue Kuukka  
Roxana Hodges

### BOARD MEMBERS

Sid McBride  
Angela Allen  
Katherine Thomas  
Arturo Coupe  
Roger Pavlik  
Laura Schwartz  
PJ Shepard

## Happy 30th Anniversary, Handi-Riders!

We're having a party, and you're invited! Please join us Sunday, November 6, 2011, as we celebrate Handi-Riders' 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. There will be a BBQ and Potluck luncheon from 12:00 to 4:00pm under the cover of our arena, rain or shine! Please give the office a call and let us know how many people will be coming with you, and what type of potluck dish you will be bringing (salad/side dish/dessert). For more information about the BBQ, see the flyer on the last page of this newsletter.

They say time flies when you're having fun! Combine that fun with a wonderful horsemanship program and you've got Handi-Riders. And here we are thirty years later plugging away at doing what we've done best all these years - providing the best in equine assisted activities to families across the north state.

Our mission to provide therapeutic horseback riding programs for special needs riders has expanded over the years with the addition of an At-Risk Youth Program, and just this year we've added a Hippotherapy Pilot Program.

What the future has in store for the next 30 years is up to us – all of us! Let's all join together to keep Handi-Riders one of the best equine assisted activities centers in Northern California!

Hope to see you all on November 6<sup>th</sup>.

~ Suzanne Bernard, Executive Director

## SAVE THE DATE

October 12	FNR Focus Film Festival - Sierra Nevada Big Room
October 15	Camelot 4th Annual Ride & Dine
October 20	Dances with Freisians - The Oakmont
November 5	Fall Session Ends
November 6	Handi-Riders 30th Anniversary BBQ - Noon to 4:00pm
November 12	The Horse Store and More Holiday Tack Faire
January 30	Winter Session Begins

## Handi-Riders Beginnings

By Tony and Freddie Holochwost, Co-Founders of Handi-Riders

### **Many Ask – When did Handi-Riders start? – How did Handi-Riders start? – Who made it happen?**

**Handi-Riders early years began in 1981.** With donated services of a Local Attorney, a Board of Directors was formed and the organization's non-profit status was established. Working together to create a unique program for challenged children and adults, the Equestrian Community, Butte County Schools Special Education Department, The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, a Farrier and Local Veterinarians started, what was then, one of the original centers for Therapeutic Horseback Riding in Northern California - **Handi-Riders**. One year later, the dedication and determination of this wonderful group of people resulted in Handi-Riders pilot program serving 15 excited riders. This founding group can never be thanked enough for their efforts. They have earned our lasting gratitude for what they accomplished.

**Among this wonderful group, there is one individual whose efforts bestow upon him the title of “Handi-Riders Founder”. This individual is Bill Sullivan.** Bill's story is as unique as Handi-Riders itself. After his retirement, Bill and his wife moved to Chico. They bought some ponies and started a small ranch Bill proudly named “One-Horse Ranch”. One day while Tony was shoeing Bill's ponies, Bill came out of the house with a magazine article and said – **“What do you think of this?”** The article was about a Michigan Therapeutic Horseback Riding Center. Bill said – **“Do you think we can do this?”** A whole new direction was about to begin! Handi-Riders started with borrowed horses, borrowed tack, the 15 original students and we borrowed Bill's “One-Horse Ranch”. Bill was on the Board of Directors, he helped at class, he walked with students in parades, he cleaned barns and he promoted Handi-Riders everywhere. But many were skeptical. They questioned our sanity when we put a challenged child atop a 1000 lb. horse. As our students physical strengths improved and their emotional state blossomed the skeptics came to understand the benefits of this new therapy.

**Memories bring a chuckle.** Handi-Riders had a horse to sell - a nice horse but just not calm enough for our purpose. Bill volunteered to sell the horse so we could use the money to buy equipment. When we checked to see how the sale prospects were shaping up Bill said – **“I'm checking the bids – I did a telephone auction – The horse goes to the highest bidder!”** We bought the equipment. **Bill never stopped working for Handi-Riders.** He would collect items all year long for our fund-raiser auction - not just a few items! He would fill his garage with tables. ALL the tables would be filled with auction items.

Sadly, many of those wonderful people are gone now. The old “One-Horse Ranch” is gone now too – bulldozed to make room for a tract of new homes. Time moves on, but there will always be so many memories.

Handi-Riders has made its home in a number of locations and has served 1000s of riders over the past 30 years. Our profound appreciation for the generosity of Chico and its surrounding communities for being the life blood of Handi-Rider's success.

To Handi-Riders new leadership and for all the future leaders who will follow may Handi-Riders take a special place in your hearts as it has in ours. Your strength and perseverance will enable Handi-Riders Students to continue enjoying freedom in motion while they reach for the sky.

### **Tony & Freddie Holochwost – Advisors & Co-Founders**

***“A man's greatest accomplishment in life is to leave behind a better place because he has been there.”***

## One Family's Story

By Jan McKissick

Their fascination with horses began when they were about 7. I am sure that my twin daughters, Lila & Caitlin, truly believed that one day I would buy them a horse (maybe one for each of them.) As a single mother living on postage stamp-sized property in Magalia, that was not likely to happen, but they could hope. I, too, was a dreamer of horses at their age. When I was 7, the aunt that Lila is named for gave me a set of 6 tiny, white porcelain horses in various poses. They always lived in a place of honor on my shelf.

By the time they were 11, the "hope" had morphed in nagging, and I began to search for a way to nurture their enthusiasm.

As a Communication Studies Faculty at Butte College, I remembered that a student had given her Informative Speech on a volunteer organization called Handi-Riders. I called her to ask if there was anything 11-year-olds could do to volunteer with the horses in the program.

The next week, Chris Latouche had them mucking out stalls and pastures. I was certain that the passion would be short-lived when they realized they had to spend 2 hours or more scooping poop just to earn the privilege of grooming a horse. Wrong! They will turn 18 in December and more often than not they are lead-walking or side-walking during both the Fall and Spring sessions.

My favorite memory of Lila happened a few days after Two-Bit came to the ranch. He had been badly treated by his former owner and was skittish and in pain. Chris had him in the round pen with another young volunteer (a friend of Caitlin's who was there that session.) She could not get Two-Bit to stop moving restlessly around the perimeter of the pen. Lila stood in the middle and began to talk softly to him. He made about 3 more circuits and then stopped in his tracks and stared at her. After a few moments, he came toward her and to my surprise (and hers) rested his head -- and no small amount of weight -- on her shoulder! She looked at me with heaven in her eyes and adjusted her stance to support him. They stayed that way for a long time. She and Two-Bit had a very special bond from that day until he died.

Caitlin's favorite horse was always Chet. She loved bathing him with the special purple shampoo that made his near-black coat and white socks shine. Chris took the three of us on a trail ride up around Danny's house and down toward the cattle pastures one day. The minute we crested the hill, Chet heard the cattle moo-ing and tried to bolt for the barn. You see, that old cow horse was afraid of cows! Caitlin kept him on course and "talked him through it" with poise.

My favorite was (and is) Jenna. Right in the middle of our time with the program, I learned that I had three ruptured disks in my neck and needed spinal fusion surgery. I have always been a very active person and the transition to restricted movement was a hard one. About eight months after the very successful surgery, Chris told us that if we wanted to ride to go grab our horse and saddle up. Without thinking, I went for Jenna. It was only when I was mounted and helmeted that I realized why that might be problematic. What an amazing day. So much so that I was moved to memorialize it in poetry:



**Jenna**  
By Jan McKissick

*Beautiful, headstrong  
half-draft  
just 7-years-old.  
Already a mother  
whose foal has weaned,  
now she works  
easy duty  
helping special people  
gain confidence  
and strength*

*And helping me  
believe  
I may regain  
some lost parts  
of myself.*

*She carries me - I guide her  
with a hand that must  
be firm and sure.  
And a heart that is  
anything but.*

*Both move tentatively  
for a time  
with  
slight confidence.  
She tests my resolve  
and discovers  
I, too,  
am stubborn.  
We come to terms  
and strike a balance*

*Her gait is smooth  
and steady.  
Remembered rhythm ripens  
within  
as we approach*

*the long orchard hill,  
and, as one,  
canter  
to its  
crest.*

*Looking back  
I see  
my own path  
is like Jenna's.  
On the whole,  
forward,  
with infrequent,  
if disquieting,  
steps back  
and to the side.*

*Our long ride  
In concert  
through the orchard  
simply  
authenticates  
the obvious.  
Insight  
is tangible  
and  
precious.*

*As I came to terms  
with Jenna,  
so I must, also,  
with this  
new self  
I choose to  
grasp  
and  
accept  
this me.*

In February of 2009, I married Jim VanRiper in Yosemite Chapel. Although the horses could not come, they sent their representatives Chris, Yves and Danny. Shortly after, Jim, too, joined the Handi-Riders volunteer family making the circle complete.

It is very hard to adequately describe the effect this amazing program has had on my family. Watching children and adults transform through their interaction with horses and trained professionals has been a rare privilege. Thank you Handi-Riders!

## Handi-Riders New Executive Director—Suzanne Bernard

By Sid McBride

I would like to introduce Handi-Rider's new Executive Director – Suzanne Bernard. Accepting this critical position at Handi-Riders takes a special, dedicated person. I was privileged to interview Suzanne and would like to share some information about her.

Her background includes 24 years of serving in several capacities for non-profit organizations including Bidwell Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, California Council for Wildlife Rehabilitators, and North Valley Animal Disaster Group. She also has 25 years experience in the private sector working in staff and managerial positions in insurance, brokerage, legal and data processing firms.

Suzanne started with Handi-Riders as a volunteer in the Spring of 2005. She was hoping to gain some horse handling skills. She quickly developed a love for the students and horses and noted the positive changes this therapy makes in a rider's life. Little did she know the change Handi-Riders would make in her life. In February of 2009 she became Volunteer Coordinator and developed a passionate appreciation for the tireless hours our volunteers give to this program and its students. In the summer of 2010 Suzanne became assistant to our former Executive Director, Danny Cuneo. She learned first-hand the administrative and fiduciary side of the program.

Suzanne lives in Paradise with her husband Bob who she attributes to keeping her focused, grounded and always supported in her endeavors. She has one daughter who has recently returned to Paradise from the north shore of Kauai. Suzanne enjoys exercising and walking with her daughter and dogs. She also enjoys yoga, reading and entertaining their family friends.

I would like to include in Suzanne's own words her vision for Handi-Riders:

"As Handi-Riders approaches the end of its 30<sup>th</sup> year as a PATH Premier Accredited Center, I would like to thank everyone who has ever helped Handi-Riders along the way. This includes those visionaries from our early years who saw not only the need for a therapeutic riding center in our area, but understood the therapeutic benefits that only a horse could provide. I would also like to acknowledge our friend and attorney, Jeff Carter, for his guidance and dedication to Handi-Riders all these years. He's been with us since the beginning and continues to offer advice and counsel as we move forward into changing times. Special thanks to all the program volunteers who have made it possible for our participants to ride.

It has not been easy, but Handi-Riders has managed to maintain its position as a viable center for equine-assisted activities through ups and downs of the economy and the comings and goings of numerous board and staff members. Consistency of purpose, and dedication to our mission statement by our Board and Staff has brought us this far.

As we look to the future let us all make a pact to do everything humanly possible to continue the Handi-Riders' tradition of excellence in the ever-expanding field of equine assisted activities. I take very seriously the responsibilities of the Executive Director position and will do my best to see that Handi-Riders continues for another 30 years."

Handi-Riders is fortunate to have Suzanne at the helm, and with a great supportive staff and board Handi-Riders will continue to provide this much needed service for years to come.



**HANDI-RIDERS 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY BBQ &  
POTLUCK-SUNDAY, NOV 6 @ 12:00-4:00PM**



**PLEASE JOIN US IN CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF  
PROVIDING THE BEST IN THERAPEUTIC RIDING TO  
THE SPECIAL NEEDS COMMUNITY.**

*Our program encourages physical, academic, social and emotional growth with emphasis on the riders' abilities. We encourage our riders to "reach for the sky"!*

**PLEASE BRING A SALAD, SIDE DISH, OR DESSERT**

RSVP to 530-533-5333 and tell us the # of people who will be attending and the type of dish you will be bringing to share.

There will be Classic Cars, Face Painting, Family Photos, Live Music, & Games for the kids of all ages, and more!!