

# Local / State

## Horseback riding helps handicapped students



Staff photo by Dave Einsel

Sherry McDonald walks the horse ridden by Mary Koenig and Rachel around the arena at the TAMU Horse Center.

By **JOYCE HALLBAUER**  
Battalion Reporter

Physically and mentally handicapped people may not have opportunities to enjoy the simple activities of walking, talking and learning new things that are taken for granted by many.

But they can learn to enjoy horseback riding through the annual Special Riding School, started in 1978 through the efforts of Dr. Doug Householder, a Texas A&M horse specialist.

Sherry McDonald, a junior animal science major, helps handicapped high school students with horseback riding at the school, which is held at the Texas A&M Horse Center on Jersey Street and sponsored by the Texas A&M Horseman's Association.

The 40 students in October's clinic, with physical or mental

handicaps or learning disabilities, range from 6 to 19 years of age, McDonald said.

The horseback therapy clinic gives the kids an opportunity to do something special, McDonald said. "They learn to turn the horses, stop, hold the reins and give commands," she said.

Horseback therapy, which can improve muscle movement in humans, has been in use in other countries, including England, since the 1950s.

"The action of the horse serves to relax the muscles," McDonald said. "For the physically handicapped that's important, because their muscles are normally stiff."

Linda Alford, 19, paralyzed from spina bifida, was able to return to this year's riding clinic even though she graduated from Bryan High School in May.

"I would ride every day if I could," she said. "When I'm on the horse I don't feel handicapped. I feel free. I want to stay forever."

McDonald and clinic Chairman Diana Johnston have added new ideas to the basic riding skills and exercise program. The students now hold relay races and go through an obstacle course, Johnston said.

The horses adapt to the limitations of the handicapped student and seem to understand the situation, McDonald said. The horse provided by the University for the three-weekend clinic, were calm and gentle, she said.

Not only did the students learn to ride horses, but they learned groom them as well, McDonald said.

## Houston votes today in mayoral showdown

United Press International. HOUSTON — Voters decide today whether to make a county sheriff — endorsed by the Ku Klux Klan — or a city controller — supported by the gay community — mayor of the nation's most populous southern city.

And the contrast between City Controller Kathy Whitmire and Harris County Sheriff Jack Heard could hardly be more striking.

Whitmire, 35, smiles little, dresses conservatively, and speaks in a high-toned voice.

Heard, 63, punctuates his conversation with one-line jokes, anecdotes of his long public service career, and relishes his image as a law-and-order candidate.

Houston, the nation's fourth largest city, has never had a woman mayor. Whitmire was a two-term controller, running un-

opposed for reelection for the second most powerful position in the city.

She said she accomplished many things as controller, but said she lacked authority in certain areas. She said if she were to have a chance to unravel additional problems of the city, she must be its chief executive.

Heard said that although he lacked the accounting and business experience of Whitmire, a certified public accountant, he has the ability to attract qualified people to run departments.

In the Nov. 3 primary election in which a quarter million people voted, Whitmire placed first, gathering about 36 percent of the votes and Heard about 24 percent.

Third-place finisher, incumbent Jim McConn, who fired one of his top aides and left the city to

vacation in Mexico shortly after his defeat, said he would not support either candidate in the runoff.

Heard has received an unsolicited Ku Klux Klan endorsement, which he has rejected.

Whitmire has been criticized by police groups — who have endorsed Heard — because she has the backing of Houston's Gay Political Caucus, an endorsement she welcomed.

In the primary election, Heard spent more than \$1.3 million, appealing to voters as "Jack Heard, the man," in a variety of print and broadcast ads.

Whitmire spent less than \$400,000 on her campaign. Most of her television ads were narrated by others.

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