



RONY ANGKRIWAN/THE BATTALION

Timothy Pratt, 10 years old, is escorted by volunteers Michael Kurz, a sophomore biomedical science major, and Matt Burke, a senior agricultural science major, during the A&M Horsemen's clinic last Sunday at Freeman Arena.

Horsing Around

Students with disabilities ride high at A&M Horsemen clinic

By MARIUM MOHIUDDIN
Staff writer

Jason is paralyzed from the neck down. He can control only one muscle in his neck. Jason is also mute and communicates using this single muscle. Despite these obstacles, Jason has the opportunity to ride horses through the help of the Texas A&M Horsemen Association.

On Sunday, Oct. 5, the Horsemen Association hosted the Special Students Riding Clinic at Freeman Arena. They offer free riding services to handicapped students from pre-kindergarten to high school. Fliers are sent out to local schools to advertise the clinic.

The event has grown from two participants at its inception in 1972 to 15 participants this past weekend. An average of 40 people volunteered for the clinic, many of whom are members of the Horsemen Association. Numerous volunteers have experience working with handicap children from YMCA camps, and they have life-saving skills.

Shannon Castle, chair of the riding clinic and a junior animal science major, said she has been involved with the clinic since she was a freshman and looks forward to this event every year.

"This is one of the most rewarding events because we are helping the public," Castle said. "The parents are very supportive, and the children are enthusiastic." Castle said the volunteers generously give their

time to this event.

"The volunteers know what they are dealing with and they have no reservations," Castle said. "They know this is a special situation which requires sensitivity. I am very confident because this is the best crowd of helpers."

Three volunteers supervise each child as they ride the horse. If a child does not have the strength in their legs to stay on the horse, then one volunteer rides with them.

Only experienced riders are allowed to ride with the children. They use the calmest and quietest horses for the rides.

The children are able to ride through obstacle courses, participate in races and run barrels. At the end of the event the children all receive ribbons and awards.

Jarah Redwine, president of the Horsemen Association and a senior agricultural engineering major, said the clinic allows the children to feel in control.

"Some of the students cannot walk, so this is a chance for them to propel themselves and control the animal," Redwine said. "It is a strong feeling for me to be on a horse, it must be great for them."

Redwine said a special bond develops between the children and the horses they ride.

"One student came asking for a particular horse," Redwine said. "The student's mom said that sometimes he cannot remember which school he goes to, but he always remembers what horse he has ridden."

Judy Pratt, whose son Tim has Down's Syndrome, said Tim has been able to diversify his experiences through the clinic.

"Four years ago, Tim got his first letter through his school," Pratt said. "So we came out and signed up

“ One student came asking for a particular horse. The student's mom said that sometimes he cannot remember which school he goes to, but he always remembers what horse he has ridden. **”**

Jarah Redwine
President of the Horsemen Association
and senior agricultural engineering major

and had that Polaroid moment.

"Tim had a ball. I went home with a big smile on my face because it was so very nice."

Pratt said her children are crazy about horses. They were initially exposed to them through their grandfather who used to have horses.

Pratt said the interaction Tim has with the horses gives him a feeling of pride.

"This is something special for him," Pratt said. "It gives Tim something that he feels is just his. It is the sort of thing that helps him feel like he is a part of the community."

"He gets off the horse walking ten feet tall, and then he is able to go back to school and tell the kids, 'I got to ride a horse this weekend.'"

Pratt said this clinic is unique because sometimes children with special needs have difficulty fitting into certain situations.

"A parent had seen Tim throwing a ball and wanted Tim to be on his baseball team," Pratt said. "But then you run into other children. If they look at Tim strange and call him names, then I am not going to tolerate that. Some kids do not know kids with special needs, so they treat him differently."

"Kids with Down's [Syndrome] already have to deal with a lot. He feels the comments. It makes him very upset. The smaller they are, the less it affects them, but as they grow, no one wants to be known as stupid."

Pratt said the Horsemen Association helps her as much as it helps Tim.

"It has been difficult, and it is never easy for a single mom," Pratt said. "That is one of the things that has made me appreciate this event."

"It is an extended family. They do not treat you like a stranger, but like you are a part of the family. It is important for the children to feel important and have all these people talk to them."

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