Article for Masterson Method

Las Vegas Horses4Heroes, Changing Lives One Horse at a Time

By Sydney Knott, President/CEO/Founder, Horses4Heroes

In the aftermath of 9/11 and with war raging in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Knott family wanted to show their support for local service members and First Responders. Horse crazy horse lovers Sydney Knott and her three daughters decided to open up their small ranch for free horse rides. Weekly visits and impromptu Thursday night barbecues eventually evolved into non-profit Horses4Heroes.

Motivated by the Middle East conflicts and large scale deployments, separating families for months at a time, there also was a local tragedy that crystallized the mission and vision for the non-profit. In February 2006, LVMPD Sgt Henry Prendes was killed during a domestic violence call. His daughter attended Faith Lutheran along with the Knott daughters. The community's outpouring of grief and support was profound and impressive. Yet Ms. Knott thought that it would be even more impressive to show support for officers and their families while they are alive, to say "thank you" in person for their service and sacrifice.

Today, Horses4Heroes' mission remains to serve local heroes and their families, including Active Duty service members, Veterans, Law Enforcement Officers, Fire Fighters/EMTs, teachers and healthcare workers, as well as those in the community who need a hand up, not a hand out. Since the organization's founding in November 2006, Horses4Heroes has introduced more than 10,000 men, women and children to horses here in Las Vegas and throughout the country via its network of affiliates. Horses are known for their calming effect and their ability to reduce stress, anxiety, and feelings of loneliness and depression. We have active affiliates in Wisconsin, Nebraska, California, and Florida.

In Las Vegas, the non-profit operates the Las Vegas Equestrian Center, a 2-25-acre ranch which serves as its headquarters and flagship facility. Here a small staff of part-time riding instructors, aptly supported by a dedicated group of volunteers, runs a busy schedule and cares for 20 horses, five miniature horses and a barnyard of farm animals including goats, pot-bellied pigs, rabbits, a sheep, a llama, a miniature steer, and Rudy the Rooster. Since its founding, the organization has taken in more than 40 donated horses, providing them with a safe, loving and caring home for the remainder of their days.

Over the past 17 years, horses have made a difference in thousands of lives, according to Ms. Knott. During the summer of 2020, a difficult summer for local law enforcement, Horses4Heroes hosted Summer Evenings at the Ranch, every Saturday for seven weeks. These families were able to visit the ranch, enjoy a light dinner and watch their kids ride horses, all in the safety and privacy of the fenced ranch. Assistant Sheriff Sasha Larkin described the outings as a much-needed opportunity to "pump the brakes."

Providing a safe place for children, teens and adults also is an important part of the mission. The Las Vegas Equestrian Center is often described as a "YMCA with horses," according to Ms. Knott. "We provide family friendly activities from horseback riding lessons to horse rides to interactions with miniature horses and farm animals as well as archery, corn hole, and horseshoes or opportunities to simply hang out under a shade tree. Summer Camps are popular at the ranch for ages 4 to 12. High school and college students serve as camp counselors during eight, one-week camps. No School Day camps are offered throughout the year, whenever the kids are out of school.

Programs like camps, riding lessons, birthday parties and field trips serve the community as well as generate revenue to support operations and fun free sessions for Veterans and First Responders with PTSD. Ms. Knott explained that the center's fixed monthly expenses exceed $25,000. Donations account for 25% of the monthly revenue, the rest is generated through programs. Proceeds also support low-cost workshops for Equine Therapy program participants and scholarships.

Horses4Heroes is proud of its track record and is grateful to the support of its members, volunteers, agencies and community partners. Partnerships with national organizations such as The Masterson Method® are important not only for the health and wellness of the horses, but also showcase Horses4Heroes' mission and vision and to introduce The Masterson Method to staff and volunteers as well as the Las Vegas community.

For more information about Horses4Heroes, or to join, participate or volunteer, visit www.horses4heroes.org. Membership is free for ActiveDuty, Veterans, First Responders, teachers and healthcare workers. Membership guarantees the lowest rates for the services offered throughout the year.