

Davisburg horse riding strengthens toddler's muscles

by Diane Dempsey Deel | Fenton Press
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Submitted Photo (Amanda Martin)

Quinn Mollenhour, 3, of Tyrone Township rides on a horse at the North American Horsefest on Nov. 8 at the Rock Financial Showplace of Novi. His mother Cyndi Mollenhour (left), grandmother Lorene Mollenhour (back) and Pam Martin, a volunteer horse leader, walk with him.

DAVISBURG, Michigan -- At 9 months old, Quinn couldn't sit up. His parents, Cyndi and Brooks Mollenhour, were concerned and took him to the doctor. The Tyrone Township youth was soon diagnosed with hypotonia, a condition that causes low muscle tone. His mother started taking Quinn to physical therapy, occupational therapy and later to therapeutic horse riding instruction when he was 2 years old.

Lorene Mollenhour of Groveland Township has a Tennessee Walker horse and knew riding increases muscle strength. She suggested to her son and daughter-in-law that therapeutic horse riding might benefit her grandson.

"I'm a rider and I understand that riding a horse at a walk uses the same muscles as a person when they walk," she said. "I was thrilled when they put him on the horse." Quinn, 3, was the youngest person to display his therapeutic horse riding skills for Pretty Pony Pastures of Davisburg at the Nov. 8 North American Horsefest, which was held at the Rock Financial Showplace of Novi.

Linda Watson, owner of Pretty Pony Pastures where Quinn takes his therapeutic horse riding lessons, said he did well with an audience.

Just as he always does in therapy, he held his own weight up on the horse, which helps strengthen his muscles.

When he rides, Quinn's mother, grandmother and trainer are close by in case he starts to fall.

"But they are not supporting him," Watson said.

She believes other children could benefit from therapeutic riding. Pretty Pony Pastures works with adults and children with autism, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy and other neurological disorders to help them gain strength and improve their confidence.

"People are often apprehensive about putting little kids on the horse, and I wanted people to see that their kids could benefit by it," Watson said. "He rode the horse just as if he was doing it for his regular therapeutic riding."

Quinn began walking when he was 2 years old, but his grandmother said he is now running.

"Horse therapy has helped him physically and psychologically," Lorene Mollenhour said.

Cyndi Mollenhour said she's noticed a difference, too, although she believes his improvement over time has been a combination of all of his therapy, including horse riding. She said he will always have problems with his muscles but in time, it should greatly improve.

Although he has undergone many tests, doctors have never given the family a specific reason for the hypotonia, which caused Quinn delayed speech and movement.

"For being as young as he is, he's done really well with it," she said. "We didn't know if he would even sit on the horse. We just didn't know what to expect. He really took to it and he seems to enjoy it."