

OAKLAND COUNTY

Davisburg therapeutic riding program offers hero appreciation day

Ever meet someone who has gone over and above the call of duty?

Do you personally know a loved one who has unselfishly put his or her life on the line?

Did you ever want to thank them in a special way for being a hero in your community?

With a desire to honor the heroes

among us, Pretty Pony Pastures, a therapeutic riding program set on a picturesque 24 acres in Davisburg, has announced a Hero Appreciation Day and Operation Free Ride from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday, May 18.

Horses4Heroes is a nationwide network of family-friendly facilities with equine-related service providers intended to serve active duty military personnel including service men and women, police, firefighters, first responders, EMS personnel, returning combat veterans and wounded warriors. It also includes critical care and hospice nurses, special education teachers and the families of these heroes.

Operation Free Ride is a one day event intended to give these warriors the opportunity to have a day out with their families and ride a horse for free.

"This is one way to thank you for the sacrifices they have made for us and our country," said Linda Watson, director and lead trainer. "We've seen the difference riding can make for an indi-

HORSIN' AROUND



SHARON GREENE



Local heroes will be honored at Hero Appreciation Day and Operation Free Ride from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday, May 18 at Pretty Pony Pastures in Davisburg

vidual in both therapeutic and traditional riding classes."

Watson is honored that Pretty Pony Pastures was selected to for this project. Those wanting to return for lessons through Horses4Heroes can participate through a discounted once-a-week program.

Although there is no fee for the one day Operation Free Ride event, registrations are required by May 16 by calling 248-634-7276 or emailing register@prettyponypastures.org.

Provide your name, number of persons

attending and phone number. Expect a confirmation call. Liability release forms must be signed for all riders. And, plan to bring identification from employment, military or a copy of discharge papers.

All of the riding will be done in the large indoor arena and available for those weighing 175 pounds or less. This facility uses the large cream-colored ponies with blonde manes and tails known as Halfingers, sure-footed smaller sized horses that are recognized for their gentle dispositions and

a willingness to please. According to Watson, they are not intimidating and are easier for the volunteers to work with.

There are a few things to know before attending. Wear long non-slip pants along with boots or tennis shoes. No sandals or open toed shoes, please. Safety helmets will be provided at the farm.

Not only will the day include a basic riding lesson, but expect to learn how to groom a horse and make a few horse treats. Children will appreciate the toy horse races and horse shoe games, too.

Horse events this month

After a long, cold winter, equestrians are anxious to get outside with their horses to enjoy a show or trail ride. Mark your calendars and plan to attend a few of these incredible local May horse events:

■ May 4 – 4H Discover Day at Springfield Oaks www.Oakfair.org

■ May 5 – Canter for a Cure show at Springfield Oaks www.TwillingateFarm.com

■ May 8 – Martial Arts for the Rider Clinic, Miracle Ranch in Milford 586-242-7351

■ May 11 – 4H Kick-off Open Horse Show at Springfield Oaks

■ May 11 – Free Gelding Clinic at Sand Stone Farm Rescue, Ortonville csan1656@aol.com

■ May 12 – Games on Horseback www.PinckneyTrailRiders.com

■ May 17 to 19 – Spring Campout and Pig Roast Weekend www.KensingtonTrailRiders.org

■ May 18 – Operation Free Ride for Heroes www.PrettyPonyPastures.org/Hero_Day.htm

■ May 18 – Ugly Sweater and Fuzzy Fun Show at Equinox Farm, Highland www.shomehorshes.com

■ May 18-19 OREA Competitive Mounted Orienteering www.HadleyHills.com

■ May 18 – Pinckney to Brighton Trail Ride www.BrightonTrailRiders.com

■ May 18 – Hero Appreciation Day – Operation Free Ride www.PrettyPonyPastures.org/Hero_Day.htm

■ May 18 – Belle Isle Renaissance Ride 734-945-8987

■ May 19 -- Spring Ride with Highland Trail Riders www.HighlandTrailRiders.com

■ May 25 – Rose Oaks Trail Ride with obstacles 248-369-8731

■ May 25 – OREA Poker Trail Ride www.HadleyHills.com

■ May 25 – 4H Triple B's Open Horse Show at Springfield Oaks

Send horse or farm information, events or comments to sharonlgreene@hotmail.com.

Riding is therapeutic and relaxing and so is a good shoulder and neck massage. Marcia Sommerville of White Horse Therapeutics will be volunteering by offering complimentary chair massages. Like Watson, she understands the importance of providing a time of enjoyment and relaxation to families who have endured stress.

The stress of a loved one who has been deployed is not lost on Watson. Her daughter served twice in Iraq in the 90s and her grandson just returned from serv-

ing in Afghanistan this year:

"This is a special day to give back to those who have given us so much," explained Watson. "Plan on an afternoon of fun for the entire family."

Hero Appreciation Day takes place 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday, May 18 at Pretty Pony Pastures, 9160 Eagle Road in Davisburg. Visit www.PrettyPonyPastures.org/Hero_Day.htm for details and release forms. Call 248-634-7276 or email register@prettyponypastures.org to register.