

This week

- Turkey dinner and bazaar – Saturday, Oct. 3, Honey Creek Community Church
- Autumnfest – Saturday, Oct. 3, Brightonwoods Orchard, Burlington
- Oak Clearing Farm and Museum open house – Sunday, Oct. 4, Union Grove

Life Style

STANDARD PRESS

THINK about it

Pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis is the longest word in most English language dictionaries. It refers to a lung disease caused by inhalation of fine silica dust.



An equine elixir

Charlotte Tinnerman, 4, is all smiles as she practices her balancing skills with volunteer Roxanne Trent (left) on a horse at the Willow Creek Ranch Therapeutic Riding Center.

Horse therapy proves just the right medicine for those with physical, cognitive disabilities

By Mark Dudzik
STAFF WRITER

In a little more than two years since opening its doors to children with physical and cognitive disabilities, the Willow Creek Ranch Therapeutic Riding Center in Waterford has opened up a whole new world for the individuals served by the program.

Whether it is something as simple as a blind person experiencing the sound of an airplane overhead that he otherwise couldn't hear from his room in a residential treatment facility or a child who has cerebral palsy getting to experience freedom of movement on horseback, the center has opened up a world of opportunity for patients.

Jennifer Pape, founder of the center, said the growth of the center has expanded beyond her wildest dreams since it debuted.

What started as a pilot program back in late 2007 with as few as three students and three program horses has since blossomed into an organization that serves 42 children and adults who have disabilities, has 11 program horses and a network of more than 70 volunteers who help assist with everything from therapy to tending to the animals.

While many of the first people served by the center were children living with autism, Pape said the center now assists children who have Down syndrome and Cerebral palsy. The center has even worked with an Iraq war veteran.

Students past and present in the program have ranged in age from 3 to 86.

While equine therapy is hardly new, knowledge of its value to certain

individuals with physical or cognitive disabilities has grown in recent years.

An outpatient coordinator for physical, occupational and speech therapy at Lakeview Rehabilitation Center, Pape herself has seen the difference equine therapy can make in a child's life and that firsthand experience resulted in her decision to open the center in Racine County.

While sessions are held with a group of riders, Pape said equine therapy can be tailored to the different needs of individuals to hone skills such as building strength and balance.

In addition, the gait of the horse provides a therapeutic sensation for riders that can help stimulate the sensory process of an individual and, in the process, make it easier for them to learn.

While the benefits of therapeutic riding have been readily recognized, insurance companies have yet to see the value of such therapy.

Because of this, the sessions at Willow Creek Ranch aren't covered by insurance. Because parents of special needs children already have their share of expenses, the center holds fundraisers throughout the year to help offset the cost of the program.

One of those fundraisers has been scheduled for Saturday, Oct. 17 at Kelly's Bleachers II in Wind Lake. The fundraiser, which will run from 6 to 9 p.m., will feature silent auctions and raffles, a cork pull and live music provided by the country band Georgia Overdrive.

From 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Oct. 17, a rummage sale will also be taking place at Willow Creek Ranch, located just east of the intersection of highways 20 and D at 27435 Washington Ave. Proceeds from that sale, along with the evening's events, will go toward a scholarship program established to help provide financial assistance for families so their children can remain in the riding program.

Those seeking more information about the center or who are interested in volunteering their time can call (262) 806-4080 or log on to willowcreekranch.org.

IF YOU GO...

WHAT: Willow Creek Ranch Therapeutic Riding Center fundraiser

WHEN: Saturday, Oct. 17 from 6-9 p.m.

WHERE: Kelly's Bleachers II, 7805 S Loomis Road Wind Lake

FEATURING: Silent auction, raffles, cork pulls, live music by Georgia Overdrive

INFORMATION: (262) 806-4080

Also among those who have witnessed the transformative nature of the therapy is Cindy Schultz, whose 11-year-old son, Gavin, receives equine therapy weekly to help with the symptoms associated with his autism.

"Now he's much calmer by doing this type of therapy," she said. "They're really good with the kids and really take the time to get to know them and work with them."

Students at the center come from as far as the northern suburbs of Chicago, the greater Milwaukee area and all parts of Racine and Walworth counties.



Volunteers help with Chad Saliscente as he takes a turn around the indoor track at the Willow Creek Ranch Therapeutic Riding Center.



Eleven-year-old Gavin Schultz reaches out during a ride. Gavin's mom, Cindy, said the equine therapy has made a real difference in her autistic son's life.

Passing Time

Soda tax. Two words that have been put together but don't actually go together the way Coke and a cheeseburger or Pepsi and pizza do. When someone first brought up the idea that sodas could be taxed, I chuckled. What was the likelihood of that happening? Well, it turns out it could happen. A soda tax has been discussed in several states, including New York and California. Then there were the comments of President Obama that appeared in the latest issue of Men's Health magazine. "I actually think it's an idea that we should be exploring," Obama said. "There's no doubt our kids drink way too much soda. And

Approving this tax won't be the last straw for me

every study that's been done about obesity shows that there's as high a correlation between increased soda consumption and obesity as just about anything else.

"Obviously it's not the only factor, but it is a major factor."

Opponents of a soda tax include beverage company representatives, producers of corn and sugar and those who simply think the government is sticking its nose into places it shouldn't just to bring in more revenue for health care. I understand how both sides

feel. And while I like to see kids develop healthy beverage drinking habits at an early age and avoid obesity, I feel compelled to offer the following viewpoint.

I need my sugar water. Why? It makes me happy!

Some time ago, I wrote a column about my love (or borderline addiction) for soda. I wrote that while I enjoy sodas, they don't control my life and I can quit drinking them whenever I wish (no, I can't).

What I have learned over the years is that while sodas may not be good for my health, they are good for my disposition. Sure, they may rot a tooth or three, but they also keep me alert and ready to take on the day, even if the day officially ended six hours earlier. And they

haven't made me obese. Not even close.

It's not like my beverage choices are limited to sodas. I drink water and juices and milk, as well. But I still prefer sodas. There's nothing like the feeling of thrusting a straw through a plastic container lid and taking a deep, satisfying sip.

I probably should feel guilty. But I don't. As I see it, I'm helping businesses. When I drink a soda, the company that produces it benefits as well as the people who contributed the ingredients that go into the soda.

And think about the ripple effects a soda drinker can have on the economy. Maybe he or she will eventually have to visit a doctor because of stomach problems. And see a dentist because of tooth decay.

If you have more people drinking water and milk, and adopting a healthier lifestyle, you'll probably have fewer doctors and dentists working. Then they'll be out on the street competing for the same jobs you are. And who wants that?

Who knows if the soda tax will become a reality. But if it does, I'll find the extra money somewhere, somehow, to keep making purchases. America is entitled to nothing less than my best effort to keep this economy moving ahead.

Still, I do promise to make wiser choices when it comes to beverages and food. After all, the stomach requires a delicate balance of the two or problems result.

Hmmm. I wonder which soda would go best with a deep-fried Twinkie?



By John Ackley