

Growing Up with SPUR

by Tara Dunford

I first met Eric in 2001 when I was a volunteer on his lesson – he was 6 years old and riding Halik. I became his instructor in 2003 and taught him most sessions that he rode in until 2009. Over the years I developed a very strong attachment to Eric as well as to his family.

Eric grew quickly and soon was too big for Halik, so we switched to Skip; little did I know what an incredible pairing these two would make, and for how many years it would last! When they first started

Skip and Eric clicked right from the start with early lessons being focused on movement.

working together Skip was a younger, stronger horse and Eric was prone to crying when you asked him to do something he didn't want to do, so I wasn't certain it would work. He and Eric clicked right from the start with early lessons being focused on movement for Eric as he loved Skip's gait and found it incredibly settling to his body. His absolute favorite position for years was sitting backwards on Skip and lying down on his rump, hugging him with his arms. On more than one occasion I had to sit Eric up and change his position so he wouldn't fall asleep! As Eric grew stronger, he developed a love of trotting on his horse – so much so

that I would recommend to the volunteers they wear sneakers, as we would trot for at least 20 minutes of our lesson.

Each session that we worked together, Eric's riding skills grew. He was able to independently control his horse at the walk and complete four-step obstacle courses without any trouble. One session we prepared him for a family trail ride on his summer vacation – and it was a resounding success. Soon he was doing his trotting work on the lunge line – to the cheers of his volunteer – while he learned to post. Skip too grew during this time – he took care of Eric, especially as we began to do more work off-lead. If he sensed Eric was off-balance he would slow his pace until Eric was centered again and he became the wonderful, dependable horse our program has been so fortunate to know. By our last session in the fall of 2009, Eric was able to ride most of the lesson off-lead, with me instructing from the middle of the ring (not right beside him) which was a huge accomplishment. I loved my Thursday nights with Eric and Skip and will always be grateful for getting to teach this amazing young man.



Avery, a horse that could accommodate Eric's long legs, with Tara Dunford standing alongside.

In 2010, Eric began riding with Instructor Marybeth DiAngelo. Because Eric was growing by leaps and bounds, we switched to Avery, a horse that could accommodate Eric's long legs. Avery is a large, stocky and very kind horse with a very big trot. His trot could bounce some riders nearly out of the saddle, but Eric could sit it beautifully and post brilliantly to Avery's big trot. They made a great pair.

Since Eric was doing so well off-lead at the walk the next step was, in small doses, to begin trotting off-lead. That did mean a little more work for Eric, and he wasn't sure how much he wanted to work. But

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BOARD MISSION

It is the mission of the Board of Directors of Special People United to Ride to work with the Monmouth County Park System to financially support and to be ambassadors for the Park System's therapeutic horseback riding and associated programs for individuals with disabilities.

PROGRAM MISSION

Working in conjunction with the Monmouth County Park System, Special People United to Ride is a non-profit organization providing individuals with disabilities the opportunity to achieve personal goals through therapeutic horseback riding.



A Message from the Presidents

Dear Friends of SPUR:

As we write this, Thanksgiving is approaching and the year is drawing to a close.

Looking back, we've had much to be thankful for in 2013:

- Students who come in increasing numbers to experience the joy and freedom of riding a horse;
- A dedicated group of instructors, barn staff and volunteers;
- A fabulous herd of therapy horses; and
- Wonderful supporters, who give generously of their time and money to help the SPUR program continue to grow.

And there's more! As you read through this newsletter you'll find articles about the various fundraising efforts SPUR has mounted to help our scholarship program. Besides raising much-needed monies, these also gave us opportunities to tell others about our exceptional program and beautiful facility.

We're excited to announce that SPUR will host a demonstration horse show on June 7, 2014, at Sunnyside Equestrian Center, to showcase our riders and their accomplishments. It has been many years since an event like this took place at a SPUR facility, so mark your calendars and come cheer on our riders.

Later in the year, we're planning a second major event. Stay tuned for the date and details.

If you have not already visited Sunnyside to see what we're all about, meet staff and horses — and witness the smiles on our students' faces — we hope you will do so soon. The doors are open during regular park hours, and someone will be happy to show you around.

We are truly grateful for your ongoing interest in SPUR and support of the program. So many of the things we do would not be possible without you!

Our warmest wishes to you and yours for a wonderful holiday season and a happy and healthy 2014.

Barbara Carroll and Barbara Duggan
Co-Presidents, SPUR Board of Directors



Our New Stable Manager



Our new stable manager Stephanie Hunt has been working with the therapeutic riding program at Sunny-

side since 2009. She is a PATH International Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor and will continue the tradition of caring for the herd using natural horsemanship methods. Stephanie has been involved with horses her whole life, and has found a wonderful home among the SPUR herd. "It is always a joy for me to be a part of the amazing gift of therapeutic horsemanship," she says. "I am very excited to begin this new phase of my journey with the Park System and SPUR!" ♦

Support for Equine Retirement

Preparing for equine retirement is a crucial aspect of herd management at Sunnyside. We are always evaluating our horses to ensure that we retire them when the time is right. It is important that our dedicated therapy horses live out the remainder of their lives in a home where they will receive the same love and care they had during their time at Sunnyside.

We have had great success in sending herd members to retirement facilities. Sometimes placement fees and retirement facility capacity hinder us in finding new homes. Another alternative would be adoption by a knowledgeable, caring local resident. Despite their age, the older SPUR horses are "easy keepers" and

make great companion horses. What they would enjoy most in retirement is some attention and a lot of quiet time to simply enjoy being a horse. They are great with kids who want to lead, pet and groom them. While they would have limited use as riding horses due to age, some might still enjoy a leisurely trail ride at the walk with a lightweight rider.

Therapy horses give so much of themselves to helping people with disabilities and are deserving of a peaceful and happy retirement. Immediate retirement is being considered for a couple of the horses living at Sunnyside. If you would like to help support our veteran equines, have a suitable home, or have any

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with encouragement and reminders from us and himself that he was now a young man, he began trotting off-lead as well. He can now trot all the way around the outside arena, with the leaders nearby.

Eric has been riding long enough that often when he does something wrong, before you can mention anything, he will tell you his mistake,

and how to correct it! Eric has improved significantly as an independent rider, but still enjoys the volunteers doing a lot of the work. He loves to test the volunteers with how much he can get them to do for him, when we know he is capable of doing it on his own. So although the lessons would sometimes start with pleas of "Help me," his pleas now quickly change to "Don't help me!" He loves being silly and joking with

Tack Sale

During the summer, the barn staff at Sunnyside spent weeks collecting, cleaning, and tagging all the surplus tack and riding items that had been accumulating over the past several years. The purpose of this hard work: to put these items in top condition so they could be sold at the Monmouth County Park System's Eco-Elephant Family Flea Market on Saturday, August 24, at Dorbrook Recreation Area, Colts Neck.

There were no price tags: People paid what they thought each item was worth, with the proceeds going to the SPUR scholarship fund. At the end of the day, their generous donations totaled \$1,106.00, and unique plans for purchases were shared, like making stools out of the saddles and using riding attire for Halloween costumes.

There are still some blankets, halters, and other pieces of equipment available for purchase at Sunnyside. For more information, please call Sunnyside Equestrian Center at 732-224-1367.

questions, please contact our SPUR Liaison, Karen Jarmusz at 732-842-4000, ext. 4383. ♦

us. Our lessons are always filled with smiles and laughter.

One of the best parts of being a therapeutic riding instructor is being able to watch your students grow and progress over time. Marybeth and I have enjoyed our lessons with Eric over the years – even though he now towers over both of us! He truly is a special young man. ♦



Wine & Beer Tasting Event

The warm autumn evening and the harvest decorations of the Thompson Park mansion created a festive air as the guests arrived. It was quite a party, fun for attendees and a successful fundraiser for our program.



SPUR hosted its inaugural Tasting Event on Saturday, October 5. Generously underwritten by Investors Bank, the evening took place at the Thompson Park Visitor Center, Lincroft. All proceeds will go toward SPUR scholarships.



As a string trio from Encore Orchestra of New Jersey, LLC, played selections ranging from classical to popular, guests sampled wines donated by R & R Marketing, J. Lohr Wines and Val's Tavern in the Walnut Room, and Ommegang Beers, donated by Shore Point Distributors, in the Oak Room. A variety of cheeses from Sickles Market complemented the wine and beer, and servers passed delicious hors d'oeuvres.



The venue's Beech Room was turned into a gallery featuring Corinne Cavallo's equine photographs and the works of Kay Hackett, who was a designer for Stangl Pottery. A butterfly sculpture from the Art Society of Keyport that survived Superstorm Sandy was on display in the front hall.



During the event, guests participated in a wine toss, silent auction, ticket auction and raffle, all to raise funds for SPUR. A video of the equestrian center and its dedicated instructors, fabulous horses, and remarkable riders, put together by Frank Duggan, was shown throughout the evening, providing all a 'virtual visit' to Sunnyside.



SPUR would like to thank all its event partners for their donations and support:

Investors Bank
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 R & R Marketing
 The Encore Orchestra
 of New Jersey, LLC

Monmouth Arts Council
 Sickles Market
 Wegmans
 Sam's Club
 Deep Cut Gardens



Cindy Continues to Pursue Her Passion



To follow one's passion is a truly admirable way to live. From an early age, horses were Cindy Ross Valoura's passion. Upon graduation

from college, she took a job in the business world but soon realized she "needed horses" in her life. Cindy began volunteering with SPUR back at Huber Woods, became a certified therapeutic riding instructor with the program, and very soon left the corporate world to become the Park System's Equestrian Program Coordinator. In 2002, as the SPUR program geared up for its move to Sunnyside Equestrian Center, Cindy took on the responsibilities of a new position: Stable Manager of the brand new facility. In addition to her duties as Stable Manager, she continued to teach SPUR students for a number of years. Always willing to share her understanding and love of

horses, Cindy has been a mentor to fellow staff, volunteers, and students. She has consistently sought to learn and put into practice techniques designed to improve the health and well being of the horses entrusted to her care. One of the most innovative of these is her study and practice of natural hoof care. As she began to realize how much this approach benefits horses, Cindy decided to share her skill and knowledge with the wider horse community and, sadly for us at Sunnyside, to resign her position as Sunnyside Stable Manager. We wish Cindy well as she continues to pursue her passion in this new direction and we look forward to her visits to Sunnyside. ♦

2013 Volunteers of the Year



We are happy to recognize **Nina Casola** as our 2013 Junior Volunteer of the Year. Since Nina began volunteering with us in June of 2012, she has helped out with just about every type of program we offer here at Sunnyside.

As a Monday volunteer, she regularly assists with five different lessons. She gives us lots of availability for the various special activities we offer in the weeks between sessions. Her help with our Youth Horseback Riding programs in the Friday lessons and

with our Summer Camp program has been invaluable; and on top of all that, she is also available to substitute for volunteers who need to miss a lesson! Nina is comfortable leading any of our horses and is also a terrific sidewalker. Quiet and unassuming, reliable, cheerful, and patient, she helps any lesson to which she is assigned run smoothly. Thanks, Nina, for all that you do for all of us at Sunnyside!

Les Neiman took an unusual path to becoming a volunteer at Sunnyside. Soon after he started taking lessons in the Park System's Adult Horseback Riding Program, our Riding Instructors Jackie West and Laurie Kelley alerted Pat Bernstein, Volunteer Coordinator, to the fact that he would make a wonderful volunteer — as indeed he has! Since April of 2013, he has volunteered over 200 hours with our programs. Les cheerfully agrees to tackle any task we send his way, whether it's coaching groups of



third graders to "try a disability" during our Disability Awareness Week or helping participants learn all they can about horses and horseback riding during our Summer Camp program. He has become one of our most active volunteers in the programs we offer to the general public. His main focus, of course, is our SPUR lessons, of which he helps with many. A skilled horse handler and calm, supportive sidewalker, Les is a key member of our Sunnyside team. We are delighted to recognize him as our 2013 Volunteer of the Year. ♦

An easier way to donate to Special People United to Ride (SPUR)!

As you know, SPUR is always seeking new ways to obtain funding for individuals with disabilities to have the opportunity to achieve personal goals through therapeutic horseback riding. That's why we joined the Care2Share Affinity Program, a free service offered by Investors Bank.

As an enrolled member of Care2Share, we receive quarterly donations, which are based on the balances that our members/supporters maintain in their Investors personal checking and savings accounts. The program costs the account holder absolutely nothing.

Here's how it works. When you or anyone you know link your Investors Bank accounts to SPUR, the bank will provide us with quarterly contributions. These contributions will be equivalent to .25% on the average balance of all personal checking accounts and .15% on the average balance of all personal savings accounts (including money market accounts, CDs and IRAs).

It is easy to enroll in the Care2Share program. If you are already a customer, just stop by any Investors branch and complete an Account Linking form. The form can also be downloaded from myinvestorsbank.com/care2share.

If you're not yet a customer of Investors, you may wish to consider them for your personal banking needs. The Account Linking form may be completed when you open your account. Plus, when you open an Investors Checking Account, your first order of checks are free.*

To learn more about how you can support SPUR through Care2Share, contact Cathy Murray at 732-431-1200. Information about the program may also be obtained at any Investors Bank branch, by visiting myinvestorsbank.com/care2share or calling the Investors' Client Care Center at 855-iBank4U (422-6548).



Donating Made Easy

Now you can support us financially without it costing you any money.

We're a member of the Care2Share Affinity Program, a free service offered through Investors Bank. When you link your Investors Bank personal checking or savings account to our organization, the bank will automatically provide us with quarterly donations, based on the average account balances you maintain throughout the year.

To learn about how easy supporting us through Care2Share really is, stop by any Investors Bank branch, or visit www.myinvestorsbank.com/Care2Share.

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Thompson Park Day – October 20

SPUR Board Co-Presidents Barbara Duggan and Barbara Carroll along with Karen Jarmusz, Monmouth County Park System Liaison to SPUR, staffed a booth just inside the entrance to greet visitors, answer questions and hand out brochures about the program and its many benefits. There was also an opportunity to purchase 50/50 tickets to benefit the SPUR scholarship program.

Farther down into the park, Sunnyside's American Mustangs, ShyAnne and her daughter, Skylark, made an appearance for a second year, enjoying all the attention they received throughout the day from the many children and adults who stopped by to pet them. Sunnyside instructors were on hand to provide information about these two remarkable horses. ♦

50/50 Winner ►

Pictured from left to right: Cathy Murray, SPUR Board Treasurer presents the 50/50 winner check of \$3,150.00 to Donna Wallace, Eatontown, alongside Barbara Finazzo, SPUR Board member. Back: Tyler



►
Skylark enjoys all the attention at Thompson Park Day.



Our newsletter is published semi-annually. Additional articles and event announcements can be viewed on www.spuronline.org. Our next issue is Spring 2014.