



Winter 2004

A publication of the Main Stay Therapeutic Riding Program, Inc.

Main Stay News

Main Stay Therapeutic Riding Program, Inc.

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Why Do We Do It?

During the winter as we find ourselves missing students, volunteers and families, we often reflect on why we started and what drives us to continue our work at Main Stay. Though the rewards are certainly great, don't be fooled—it is work—hard work—and lots of it. Is it worth the effort? Of course the answer is a resounding yes!

What drives us to hold another fundraiser, write another letter, make another phone call, attend another conference or freeze while rolling up the hoses and working another horse? It's extraordinarily simple—students and their accomplishments! After nearly 20 years of watching students bloom at Main Stay here are just a few reasons *why we do what we do.*

After seven seasons of riding, Erin ended her last class this year singing, "It's a Small World After All." What's so amazing about that? Erin began riding at age 6 and still was not talking—at all. Three months after her first ride, her body had gained adequate trunk strength to fill her lungs with enough air that we heard her squeak out her first word at the letter M, "Mom!" This year she's singing!

Sara waits every Tuesday, all winter long at the door leading to the car, waiting for her ride to Main Stay. What's so amazing about that? To most people Sara appears unaware of others. She is unable to communicate her needs. She seems completely dependent on others ... *but she knows what day she is supposed to ride!*

Anna's mom beams as she tells us about their summer vacation. Seven-year-old Anna walked along the boardwalks with her brother. What's so amazing?

Before riding gave her enough strength to walk, she would have been confined to a stroller or needed to be carried.

Dana has been working for several years at the McHenry County Courthouse. Amazing for a girl nearly crippled with shyness. In fact, we waited

nearly a year to hear her say *one* word out loud. Now she competently and confidently is responsible for filing thousands of McHenry County documents.

Kiana and Allison ride together every Friday. Each of these young girls have endured numerous surgeries—both are ready to ride as soon as possible—even before their bodies, instructors and doctors are ready to release them. Neither understands the powerful motion, torque and energy the horses inflict on their healing bodies. They just want to return to each other and have fun!

Sometimes the accomplishments are huge, like that first word or the first time out of a wheelchair. Sometimes the accomplishments are much more subtle: the ability to swallow more easily, improvement in handwriting and concentration, a decrease in aggression, and a student's ability to sleep better after riding.

Besides time spent in the arena, Main Stay becomes a platform for new friendships for students, volunteers and staff. Birthdays, holidays, graduations and weddings are celebrated and honored together. Perhaps the harshest reality of how Main Stay impacts lives is having to attend the funeral of a student, family member or volunteer. It is then that the family relates the joy Main Stay brought into their lives ... a sobering but inspiring occasion.

The healing power of the horse is strong. All of us at Main Stay believe that the time we spend at the farm rejuvenates both body and spirit. The healing takes place not only for our students but for volunteers and staff as well. 🐾



Anna, riding Shasta, with Cindy Johnston and Mick Kurowski by her side.

From the Director's Desk

After seven months on the job I'm getting the hang of it. I've learned to watch where I'm stepping when I'm in the pasture. I've learned that board meetings last three hours regardless how *long or short* the agenda. I've learned that Main Stay parties can be fattening. And, I've learned not to grab the electric fence (it was a shocking experience!).

But seriously, I've learned what a wonderful program we have at Main Stay. The credit for this goes to our eager and hard-working students, our talented instructors, our devoted parents, our extremely dedicated volunteers, and of course, our wonderful horses.

I have also learned that it is going to take a tremendous amount of fundraising to keep our program prospering and growing. We pride ourselves in the fact that no rider has ever been turned away because of financial difficulties. Less than 10% of our operating budget is covered by rider fees (*see related article is this issue*). And we provide a number of full scholarships to various students.

One of my most important duties as your executive director is to raise funds for Main Stay. But I do not do it alone—nor could I. A volunteer group puts together our *Evening in the Country* event, which includes dinner and entertainment, a raffle and an auction. Another group oversees the *Bowlathon*. The office staff prepares and sends out our *Annual Appeal*. I search for grants and corporate gifts. WE NEED YOUR HELP WITH ALL OF THESE.

I have sent a letter to all our riders' parents outlining how they can help. We work hard to keep our lesson costs low to help alleviate the financial pressures that parents face because of medical costs, therapy, etc. Therefore, it seems appropriate that they step up to the plate to sell raffle tickets, acquire auction gifts, get Bowlathon pledges, etc.

Would you (volunteer, parent, staff member, friend of Main Stay) spend a few moments to consider what you might be able to do to help with our fundraising efforts? Do you know of a prospective donor (corporate, organizational or an individual of means) we could approach? Does your employer have a matching donation program? Have you heard about a grant for which we might apply? Can you acquire a nice gift for our auction? Can you volunteer for an event or committee? Do you have a great idea for fundraising (one that requires little time but would bring in a lot of dollars)? Perhaps you may be able to write a check yourself?

Our fundraising goal for 2004 is higher than it has ever been. It will be a challenge to say the least. We must leave no stone unturned. But we must succeed—the alternative is not an option. Please, help us succeed. We need every one of you reading this newsletter to help us in our fundraising efforts. Please contact me and let me know your ideas, how you can help, a name to contact, or whatever you can offer. Our phone number is 815/653-9374. My email address is: ed@mstrp.org. I'll even spring for lunch if you can lead me to that next four- or five-figure donor.

Welcome New Staff
Valerie DeBartolo,
Instructor

Gary M. Stamm



- **Board of Directors**
- President
- Sandy Swank-Sunseri
- Vice President
- Ursula Foszcz
- Secretary/Treasurer
- Sara Foszcz
- Members
- Loriann Dowell
- Wendy Marchel
- Joan Rowe
- Dave Wymer
-
- **Advisory Council**
- Patti Klein Manke, DVM
- Tim O'Connor
- Margaret Schulte
- Reid Sunseri
-
- **Staff**
- Executive Director
- Gary M. Stamm, CAE
- Administrative Assistants
- Joan Castell
- Diane Hesch
- Program Director
- Jean Maraist
- Volunteer Coordinator
- Roxie Elliott
- Barn Manager
- Jennifer Rizza
- Instructors Anna Whitworth,
- Jean Maraist, Sara Foszcz,
- Roxie Elliott, Sandy Barcus,
- Valerie DeBartolo
-
-
- Articles and feature stories
- contributed by
- Sara Foszcz, Jean Maraist,
- Gary Stamm, Jennifer Rizza
-
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NARHA
North American Riding for the
Handicapped Association, Inc.
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From the Barn Manager

Although the riding season ends in November and doesn't begin again until April, the horses do not just play all winter long. While the humans are out holiday shopping and celebrating in November and December, the horses take a well-deserved break. They spend their days growing fuzzy winter coats and grazing out in the fields.

Once January arrives, it is back to work for the horses. They need to exercise (just like the rest of us) in order to stay in good physical condition. Training time both on and off the horse ensures that the horses remain well behaved and happy.

As the riding season approaches, the horses are given a refresher course on all the special equipment used during classes. We don't want our horses to be surprised when a student accidentally bounces a ball off them that was intended for the basketball hoop! The important work done over break is well worth it when students return with their smiling faces and classes begin again. 🐾



Arena Happenings

Fall was a busy time in the arena. Some of our students' siblings came off the sidelines and rode during class time. This opportunity allowed them to experience what happens during a class, and they found out it's hard work (and a lot of fun!). It can be difficult for siblings to come week after week and watch their brother/sister ride. Some of the Main Stay students even helped teach part of the lesson, offering them the chance to share their knowledge. Pictures were taken of each sibling and a scrapbook was made asking the kids what they liked best about riding. *Sibling Week* was a great success and we'll hold it again this year due to popular demand!

Medieval times came to Main Stay during the month of October. The arena was decorated with heraldry banners as knights and dames rode their steeds. The four-week session revolved around the role horses played during that time period. The students jousting, went on a quest, learned about knights and participated in many other activities.

Theme month helps our students think about horses in a different context and learn something new. We're looking forward to another great learning experience this fall. 🐾

'Zip' and 'April' Need New Homes!

Some of the horses we purchase have difficulty adapting to the specialized field of therapeutic riding. Only after we observe a horse working in the program for a period of time can we tell if it will meet our needs. We currently have two horses that would be better suited in a different environment.

April is an eight-year-old registered Paint mare who is buckskin in color. She has been a successful broodmare and has a sweet personality. She is very comfortable in all her gaits, but needs a little additional training. Asking price is \$2,500.

Zip is a 17-year-old registered Quarter Horse. He has been well-trained and shown primarily in Western pleasure. He is chestnut in color and a real gentleman. Asking price is \$1,800.

We would love to get these two horses a new home where they can be happy. Please call the farm if you or anyone you know may be interested in seeing them. 🐾



What Main Stay Means to Me

My name is Marty Ryan. I am sixteen years old and have been going to Main Stay for about two years. I ride a horse named Jazz.

Jazz is a very fast, loyal, and trustworthy horse. He can be a little moody at times, but I think that through the years, I have been able to teach him not to be so much trouble. I have grown closer to Jazz through riding, and I have gotten to know him very well.

One thing that I've learned while riding at Main Stay is that all horses are different. They are just like humans. They all have different personalities, and you have to take the time to get to know what each horse is like.

My Teacher

My instructor's name is Roxie. Roxie wasn't always my instructor at Main Stay, though. For the first year my instructor was Anna. But after her schedule changed, Roxie took over teaching me.

Roxie has always been very supportive of me when I ride. She is always complimenting me and giving me good advice to improve my riding skills. Roxie is a great friend of mine, too.

My Volunteer

My helper's name is Scott. Scott has been helping me out at Main Stay for a few months now. He leads my horse when we do activities where I can't control my horse and participate at the same time. Scott is very supportive, like Roxie. He always helps me out and gives me tips and pointers.

Without Roxie and Scott, I don't think that I would be a very good rider. They have helped me

realize that I have a lot of potential, and that when I put my mind to something I can do anything.

My Friend

My friend Sierra goes to Main Stay too. She is a few years younger than me, and she is a very nice girl. Sierra and I always help each other out while we ride. We give each other tips and pointers to help improve our riding skills.

I enjoy being with my friend and helping her out. I think that through the years that I've been riding with her, I have inspired her to become a better rider.

My Family

One other person who has always been very supportive is my mother. She has been riding horses ever since she was very young, and she is very encouraging when she watches me ride. She is always there after riding to tell me what a great job I've done, which is nice because I don't have many people who compliment me.

My Skills

Currently, I'm very good at riding, but not perfect. I can do the following things on my horse: steer my horse, make emergency turns, whoa (stop), back up, trot, canter, and I can also mount my horse without a stepladder. It took me a long time to master these skills, and I am still trying to improve myself.

You should always have confidence in yourself, and no matter what, you should never give



Marty and Roxie, his instructor, celebrate at the Main Stay student horse show.

up. When I first came to Main Stay, I didn't think I was cut out to be a rider, but my instructor and friends have proved me wrong. I'm glad that I didn't give up, because if I did I probably wouldn't be where I am now.

My Main Stay

I always look forward to going to Main Stay, because I get out of the house, plus, it gives me something to do other than play Nintendo. I also love being with my friends. I also just love being at Main Stay. The barn is a great environment. The cats are always playful, and they never bite or hiss.

Overall, these two years at Main Stay have been some of the best years of my life. I've learned a lot of things about horses, and much more about myself. Main Stay is like family to me, and I'm glad that I have friends who understand me. A lot of people don't know what it's like to be autistic, but my family and Main Stay do, and I'm glad that they are my friends. 🐾

Volunteer Spotlight



Sandy Swank-Sunseri

We'd like to introduce you to **Sandy Swank-Sunseri**, current President of the Main Stay Board of Directors. Sandy has been on the board for six years serving in many different capacities, including five years as Secretary. Sandy has a wonderful leadership style, treating everyone with respect and genuine care. She listens to all points of view and leads by example. It's a big job making sure Main Stay remains fiscally responsible and viable for years to come. Sandy handles it with grace.

Sandy has been involved with Main Stay for over 13 years and has served in many different areas besides her work with the Board. She worked in the ring volunteering with the students and horses for ten years, but unfortunately, had to stop due to health issues. She has seen firsthand the benefits of therapeutic riding. Her enthusiasm then led her to get more involved. She has served as a member of the *Team*, a committee that serves as a liaison between the many groups of people at Main Stay. Sandy has also been instrumental in helping organize many Main Stay events. Let's just say, Sandy knows how to throw a good party.

Sandy is thrilled to watch Main Stay continue to grow through the efforts of the Board, students, parents, staff, the community and everyone involved. She feels as a volunteer, she gets as much out of being here as the students. As Sandy often says, "Main Stay volunteers have such giving hearts."

Main Stay is like a second family to Sandy, which will make it even harder for us to say goodbye to her. This summer Sandy will be relocating to Colorado to enjoy her retirement. We're so thankful that Sandy has shared so many years and so much of her talent with us. 🐾



A big thank you to our high money earners at the 17th Annual Bowl-a-thon. Pictured from left to right in the front row is Jean Foszcz, Kaleigh Foszcz, Norm Young, Kathy Campo and Roxie Elliott. Mike Tetreault, Rusty Foszcz and Troy Rothschild are in the back row. 🐾

The 'Ins' and 'Outs' of Main Stay

Occasionally we are asked, "Where does the money come from to operate Main Stay and how, exactly, is it used?" These are both excellent questions. The answers should be of interest to our volunteers, supporters and parents.

The 2004 Main Stay budget projects an income of \$276,510.

The sources of that income break down as follows:

- Annual appeal—\$75,000 (27%)
- Special events (*Evening in the Country* and *Bowlathon*)—\$65,000 (24%)
- General donations and memorials—\$52,000 (19%)
- Grants—\$51,790 (19%)
- Program fees—\$22,230 (8%)
- Miscellaneous (workshops, clothing sales, interest, horse sale, etc.)—\$9,500 (3%)

Our expenditures for the same period are budgeted at \$275,048 including the following:

- Program (instructor fees, teaching aids, continuing education, volunteer recruiting and retention, and program management)—\$105,086 (38.2%)
- Property (mortgage, maintenance, improvements, utilities and taxes)—\$47,867 (17.4%)
- Fundraising and marketing—\$43,119 (15.7%)
- Administration—\$35,268 (12.8%)
- Horses (feeding, care, veterinarian, purchases, etc.)—\$31,039 (11.3%)
- Insurance—\$12,666 (4.6%)

We work hard to keep our expenses as low as possible. We conservatively estimate that our volunteers contribute an additional \$50,000 to \$60,000 in labor per year! As you can imagine, we are very grateful to the many organizations and individuals who contribute financially. (Please read the donor page in each issue and help us thank our supporters.)

One special donor is the Mental Health Resource League of McHenry County. The League has provided very generous annual grants to Main Stay for quite a number of years. As you can see, even with the tremendous support we receive running the program, keeping fees reasonable for our riders and their parents is a big undertaking. That's why it takes *all of us*, working together, to support our fundraising events and seek new income possibilities. Please contact us with any questions or ideas. 🐾



Hunter gives his pony, Dolly, a well-deserved pat. 🐾

Learning Corner

Gary Stamm (Executive Director) and Jean Maraist (Program Director) attended the annual North American Riding for the Handicapped (NARHA) conference in November. The conference was an opportunity to learn new things as well as network with other riding programs from all around North America.

Gary spent his time on the administrative aspects of running a therapeutic riding center, such as updating and/or acquiring computer software and fundraising. As an instructor and program director, Jean attended horse and programming sessions.

A therapeutic riding center needs money, students, horses, volunteers, staff and a facility to be successful. The conference was a great way to hear how other people handle all of those varied components. It was exciting to talk to so many other people dedicated to enhancing people's lives through therapeutic riding. Gary and Jean are eager to apply their new knowledge and make Main Stay even better during the upcoming riding season. 🐾

Closing Thoughts

As I write this it is a week before Christmas and you will be reading it after the New Year—a busy, hectic time of year for most people. A joyous time, a reflective time, a nostalgic time—for many even a sad time. The holidays usually bring out the best in us and *occasionally* the worst. It is my hope as each of us resolves to make the New Year a better year, that we turn our energy outward. I hope that we find the energy to focus on others and in return find the joy of giving. I hope that we will see the magic and dignity in all people, including ourselves.

This is why Main Stay remains strong—so many good people doing for others. We strive to find the magic and to help each student find their gifts, and then encourage them to shout them out to the world! “Giving is receiving” at Main Stay. I recently read that when you give to others, you may not get an immediate thank you from the person you help, but that it “*upholds the integrity of the universe*”... Enough said.

Peace, love and gratitude to each of you in the New Year!

Love,
Sara



Troy always gives his best during lesson time.

Pancake Breakfast February 22 to Benefit Main Stay

The Jaycees are hosting an all-you-can-eat Pancake Breakfast to benefit Main Stay. It will be held on Sunday, February 22, from 8 a.m. to noon at the Moose Lodge at 3535 North Richmond Road (Route 31) just north of McHenry. Tickets are available at the door—\$6 for adults and \$4 for kids. Hope to see you there!



Participation Form

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

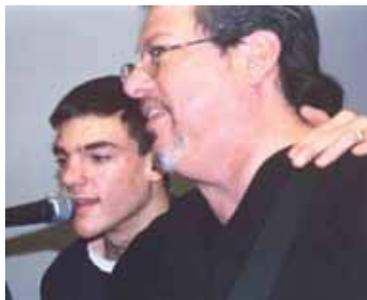
Phone _____ Email _____

- I'd like to contribute to the program fund. Enclosed is \$_____.
- I'd like to support the monthly upkeep of a horse. Enclosed is \$_____.
- I'd like to become a volunteer.

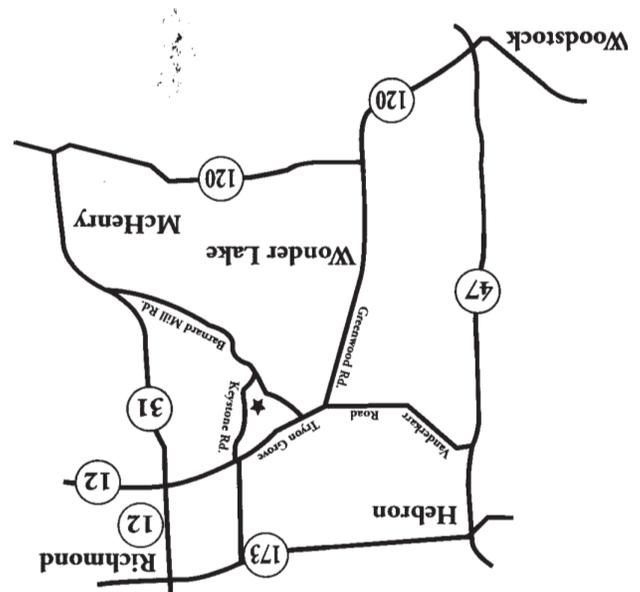
Join the Main Stay Team!	
Leg-Up Club	\$1-\$99
Bronze Stirrup Club	\$100-\$249
Silver Stirrup Club	\$250-\$499
Gold Stirrup Club	\$500-\$999
Platinum Stirrup Club	\$1,000-\$4,999
Grand Prix Club	\$5,000+

*Thank you for your support. Your contribution is tax-deductible.
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Another wonderful riding season has come to an end. Students, families, volunteers and staff gathered to enjoy each other's company (right), receive year-end awards, and celebrate the holiday season. Bart Alonzo (below right) played festive music for all, with some of the Main Stay kids jumping in to help.



Santa made a special appearance distributing goodie bags to all the children (far left). Social events are a lot of fun and a great way for everyone to get to know each other better. We're sad to be off over the winter, but know that spring will be here before we know it.



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