

## Harmony Farms' therapeutic horse-riding program helps a wide range of disabled people; raising funds to repair the driveway at its facility in Cocoa

By Ken Datzman

COCOA — For nearly 30 years, Harmony Farms Inc., a volunteer-based charity, has offered therapeutic horse-riding opportunities to disabled people of all ages.

Their program is designed to enhance the participants' quality of life and build confidence.

And the participants — under the watchful eye of Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructors — have gained from Harmony Farms' equine-assisted therapy, reaping physical and psychological benefits.

Through the years, studies have shown that handicapped individuals can benefit from trying to maintain balance in response to a horse's motion and strengthen the same muscle groups they would use in walking.

"Equine-assisted therapy builds confidence and self-esteem, and it's fun," said Pamela "Pam" Rogan, the founder and executive director of Harmony Farms. "This is therapy, but it's therapy on the back of a big, warm, fuzzy animal. And the children and families love it."

The Alysia Smith family's three handicapped children — Nico, Nixon, and Bella — have all benefited from their involvement in Harmony Farms' riding program.

"Bella said she had an interest in riding horses," said her mother. "So I started looking at places where she might be able to ride. Bella has prosthetic legs, so it wasn't like I could go to any equine facility and have her take lessons."

Alysia Smith added, "When I discovered Harmony Farms, I called Pam (Rogan) and scheduled a tour of facility. I was impressed by the safety they have for the kids. That was a concern of mine. Nico does not have arms and he can't hold onto things. Bella started riding first. That was about four years ago. Nico would come with us to Harmony Farms and he decided he wanted to try it, and Nixon got involved too."

"It's fun riding a horse. And it helps my core. I like to control the horse," said Bella.

"We go on little trail rides in the pasture," said Rogan, a Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor. "The Smith family is absolutely amazing."

Alysia Smith said Bella's "core strength is unbelievable. She gets comments all the time about how great she walks on prosthetics. Part of it, I believe, is the participation in this riding program."

Nico says he "really likes horses. Duke is my favorite. I ride Spud, too. I like to give them treats, such as mints."

"We were surprised horses chew hard mints," said Alysia Smith. "And they eat peanuts in the shells."

Rogan said when she first met Nico, he said: "Do you think I can ride a horse?" Rogan answered: "Do you think I can ride a horse?" He said "yes." Rogan said, "Let's go do it. The kids have to be positive about it." She added, "At Harmony Farms, we emphasize ability — not disability."

Nixon, who endured multiple surgeries on his legs and arms, also joined his brother and sister in the riding program. "I highly believe that part of his ability to walk was because of the equine therapy at Harmony Farms. Nixon never walked before," said Alysia Smith.

"Getting up on a horse is a big deal for all three of them. I think riding the horses has actually given them more confidence. They ride once a week," added Alysia Smith.

Rogan, whose facility is a member of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International, said "a horse's gait is the closest to a human's gait. A horse's pelvic movement is the same as a human's. So if



BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

Harmony Farms Inc. has been serving disabled individuals of all ages for nearly 30 years. The volunteer-based nonprofit organization provides equine assisted therapy and activities to help the program participants build confidence and enhance their quality of life. From left: The Alysia Smith family kids, Nico, Nixon, and Bella; and Pam Rogan, founder and executive director, Harmony Farms. The kids ride once a week at Harmony Farms.

you have a rider like Nixon, or even an adult rider, who has been in a wheelchair all their life, they have never used their lower body. They have never used their upper body, their trunk, or their core the way you do when you walk."

She continued, "When they ride a horse, they have to use their body to sit up. Doing that strengthens them, and it only builds from there. So with Nixon, particularly, the movement in the legs and in the hips really helps the body

get in shape through riding."

Rogan said if the kids are "physically and mentally able, we teach them how to ride their horse, how to control their horse — start, stop, go, do trail patterns, all kinds of things. They are learning those things. They are not just sitting on a horse for a pony ride. They have to be engaged."

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## Harmony Farms

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Because of the virus pandemic, Harmony Farms was not able to offer its riding program for three months — March, April and May 2020 — and it impacted its finances.

“We lost three months of riding income. We were also unable to host our fundraisers. We didn’t have the ‘Buckaroo Ball’ last year and will not have it this year. And we usually have the ‘Blizzard at the Barn’ in December and that didn’t take place. We had several other small fundraisers canceled as well,” said Rogan, who stepped up her grant-writing efforts to secure funding.

By August 2020, Harmony Farms had lost \$45,000 in income, she said. “We just can’t shut our doors. We have 12 hungry horses to feed. Not only do we have to feed them, but we also have to provide care for the horses. We also have to maintain the property, and we have a mortgage.”

Harmony Farms applied for the Paycheck Protection Program and a Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act grant. It received small funding from each. Harmony Farms also received a \$10,000 grant from the Doug Flutie Jr. Foundation for Autism.

“Harmony Farms is excited to have received a Signature Grant from the Doug Flutie Jr. Foundation for Autism,” said Rogan. “We can’t wait to provide more opportunities for people with autism to participate in therapeutic horseback riding. This year, more than ever, people with autism need to get back to their routines and back in the saddle. With this grant, we can now directly help more people with autism.”

Between August and December Harmony Farms had already raised \$40,000 in grants. “But it’s still a day-to-day challenge because we are down a number of riders in our ranks. They will return in September, assuming we

are somewhat back to some kind of normality in society. We’re keeping our fingers crossed. Meanwhile, we’ve been appealing to anyone and everyone who can help our organization. We’ve been doing OK,” she said.

Rogan said Harmony Farms has a “fabulous core of volunteers. Whenever the word gets out, we need help, they step up. And they have done it every single time we needed assistance.”

Her organization is an approved location for community-service requirements for area schools.

Harmony Farms is located on Pluckebaum Road. “We have been here for five years and during that time we have experienced a flood, a hurricane, and now we’re going through a pandemic,” she said.

The property is in need of some improvements and Harmony Farms is currently raising money to pay for upgrades that have been made to its driveway into the facility.

“We did not have potholes, we had craters. It was a limestone driveway that was put in five years ago. The first two months here we took on two feet of water. We had the driveway repaired, but it didn’t hold up. We have too much traffic coming through. For instance, we have 18-wheelers bringing in our sawdust,” said Rogan.

Harmony Farms had started a “Fix the Driveway” campaign, and got off to a good start with the help of a local general contractor who was working a job nearby and had some left over hot asphalt.

He gave Harmony Farms a discounted price for the materials and labor. Altogether, it amounted to \$16,000. “We started the Fix the Driveway campaign to pay off that amount. I’m happy to say we have raised close to \$9,000 just from volunteers and outside people making contribu-

tions. But we can certainly use more help,” she said.

Once the driveway is paid for, Harmony Farms will be addressing other facility-improvement needs, including fencing, said Rogan.

“We need to replace our fencing. We have to corral the horses. Sections of the fencing are in need of repair. We’re using a lot of Duct Tape to hold the fencing together.”

Businesses and individuals interested in helping Harmony Farms can email [info@harmonyfarmsinc.com](mailto:info@harmonyfarmsinc.com), or call (321) 631-9433.

Its web address is [www.harmonyfarmsinc.com](http://www.harmonyfarmsinc.com).

Harmony Farms has some new programs on the horizon designed to help veterans, and children in foster care.

Running Harmony Farms has been a second career for Rogan, one in which her work is impacting the lives of many people in the community.

Rogan moved to Brevard County from upstate New York in 1990 with her husband, who took early retirement from IBM Corp. Pam Rogan was employed by Hartford Financial for 20 years.

“When we moved here my objective was — if I didn’t have to go back to work — to do some volunteering in the community with children or animals,” she said.

Rogan landed a volunteer position at an existing grant-funded entity that was looking to start a therapeutic-riding program. Within three months, she was named president of the board and soon that nonprofit reorganized and became Harmony Farms.

“Each individual at Harmony Farms enjoys his or her role helping the riders and the families. We thank the community for their support, especially through this pandemic,” said Rogan.

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