

ARIES: Advanced Riders and Independent Equestrians of SPUR

In honor of our beloved Aries and his wonderful ability to teach students to ride, we have dubbed our new group therapeutic riding program ARIES (Advanced Riders and Independent Equestrians of SPUR). The program is designed to benefit students, ages eight to eighteen, whose main goal is independent riding.



Group lessons have taken place on a less formal basis in the past with varying degrees of success. The organization of the ARIES program has allowed the ideas of the past and present to take shape into something that will benefit students for years to come. The SPUR



instructors have been excited about this program since its initial planning stages and have been providing input into each of its development stages to make it everything it can be. Even the name of the program was a collaborative effort. Thanks to instructor Christine Landuyt, we have a name that honors the riders and a veteran therapy horse. Instructor Tara Dunford stated that "I have now taught ARIES lessons during the past three sessions – Winter, Spring and Summer – and feel just as strongly



about them as I did before we launched the program!"

SPUR students enter into the ARIES program by instructor recommendation after completing a minimum of one 8-week session of private SPUR lessons. Classes of up to four students meet once a week for an hour. Grouping these students together has allowed for an increase in the number of students that can be enrolled each session and an expansion of the scope of the student's education.

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*Our
best wishes
for a
Happy
Holiday
Season*



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A Message from the President

Wow, does a year go fast! SPUR has had an outstanding show of support from individuals, local businesses and corporations in 2007. Our annual fund raiser was a huge success. Thanks to Steve Bidgood of Salt Creek Grille, we raised over \$50,000 to support our scholarship and horse funds.



Our two yearly events of Polo and Barrel Racing also contributed funds to our riding students' programs. Selling horse tail lengths of raffle tickets at polo helped make this year's raffle the best ever. (Thank you "Te" for the use of your tail.) The best news yet is that Phase II of our construction project is almost complete. We will now have an observation area for family and friends, offices for staff, a therapy room, and new bathrooms.

We hope to invite all SPUR members, volunteers, donors, and interested individuals to a SPUR Open House in the new year.

As I move on to my new position of past president, I must say it has been an honor to serve this great program. Hearing the positive feedback of how our riders are making functional and emotional gains is worth everything. And, on a final note, I must thank the exceptional SPUR Board of Directors who give unselfishly of their time, are talented dedicated, and extremely hard working. With our new President Kate Gotterup energetically guiding us into more exciting times, we will continue to fund and grow our SPUR programs.

Donna Singer
SPUR Board President

Annual Polo Match to Benefit SPUR



The annual Colts Neck Polo match to benefit SPUR was held at Bucks Mill Park on Sunday, August 26th at 2:30 pm. Colts Neck Polo Club played against Shannon Hill Club of Liberty Corner, NJ.

The day was hot and sticky, but the players and horses didn't seem to notice. Everyone played hard and had a good time. Many tailgaters enjoyed the sunny day and the exciting game.

During the half time period, Lili Claire Portmann, a SPUR student, provided the crowd with a lovely demonstration of her riding skills. She and her mount, Snowflake, navigated through obstacles with ease and showed off a

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Left to right: Volunteer-Wende Pickens; student-Lili; instructor-Liz Haenchen and barn manager/instructor-Cindy Ross.

Advanced Riders and Independent Equestrians of SPUR

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During the hour, students practice a variety of mounted and non-mounted skills. First, each student assists with the grooming and tacking of their mount. They learn the responsibility of working safely around a horse and checking their equipment in preparation to ride. Once mounted, students work to refine their ability to control their mount at the walk and trot, through obstacles, during games and even on a trail ride.

“Group lessons offer some unique benefits that the individual SPUR lessons do not – they get to socialize/interact with other riders on horseback; they get to watch each other, which can be incredibly helpful when learning a new skill or position,” said Dunford. “The longer riding time has definitely helped the students become physically stronger, and they truly enjoy interacting with the other riders during games and discussions. They all adapted to the group setting well.”

Dunford also expressed that there are challenges for both students and instructors during the ARIES lessons that are nothing like the private lessons. “It is incredibly challenging for our riders to switch from having an instructor standing right next to them to having an instructor standing in the middle of the ring, sometimes 50 feet away, while giving directions, but I believe this is a skill that will help them immensely in the future.”

“As an instructor, the ARIES lessons have challenged me to become more creative and flexible,” Dunford continued. “Four students of differing abilities, with different styles of learning, present some unique challenges; but watching them accomplish various goals during our eight weeks together is incredibly rewarding.”

Stable Manager and Instructor Cindy Ross explained another important aspect of the group classes. “The ARIES program is a great opportunity not only for students to work on more advanced



horsemanship skills, but also to learn to work more in partnership with their horses.” Ross shared that it has been especially fun to watch one student in particular progress in the ARIES classes. “We spent a lot of time in her private lessons discussing equine psychology and communicating confidence and leadership to the horse. It is evident by the way the horse relates to her that she has earned his respect and that he trusts in her leadership. I am so proud of her!”

Jessica Viverito started riding with SPUR at age eight in the private lessons. She is now 13 and will be riding in her fourth ARIES class this fall.

Sunnyside Equestrian Center 2008 Program Calendar

Intersession

December 10th-February 1st
– ARIES Groups Only

Winter Session (8-week)

February 18th-April 12th
– SPUR and Youth Classes

Open Enrollment

April 1st-30th
– For new students

Spring Session (8 week)

April 28th – June 21st
– SPUR and Youth Classes

Facility Closed

in observation
of Memorial Day, May 26th
– No Lessons

Summer Session (8 weeks)

July 7th – August 29th
– SPUR Classes

Facility Closed

in observation
of Independence Day, July 4th
– No Lessons

July Youth Summer Camps

July 7th-11th
July 14th-18th
July 21st-25th

August Youth Summer Camps

August 4th-8th
August 11th-15th
August 18th-22nd

Open Enrollment

September 1st-30th
– For new students

Fall Session (8 weeks)

September 15th – November 8th
– SPUR and Youth Classes

Volunteer workshops will be held throughout the year as needed.

Annual Polo Match

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lovely trot. After their demonstration, Lili rode through the tailgating area to greet onlookers. 50/50 raffle tickets were sold throughout the day. The new hit was a length of tickets as long as a horse’s tail for \$50. Our newest and youngest therapy horse, Te, made his polo match debut following the ticket sellers and modeling his long black tail. The raffle raised \$3,284 to benefit SPUR.

A special thanks goes out to Kaajia Brock who donated \$100 of her winnings from her first prize, and Connie and Virginia DiChiria who donated their entire third prize winnings back to SPUR. Congratulations to the winners!

Brooke Lichter: "A Volunteer At Last!"

I remember hanging out near the ramp where the riders mounted or reaching way up to pet a horse in the field at Huber Woods while my brother Justin took his riding lessons. I was almost 4 years old, and my brother was 7. My mom thought I would become a SPUR volunteer some day, and thanks to help from Cindy and Pat, I actually got recognized last year for volunteering many hours with this great program.

My family has a long history with SPUR. My mother has always had an interest in horses, and she told me that she visited the program at Thompson Park. She was going to go to college at that time. Little did she know that she would have a son with special needs that would ride in the program for many years. She told me that she cried when Justin walked off upon Rocky for his first lesson – she had never seen him so straight, tall, and proud.

Another big moment was in 1996, when Justin was the 'demo rider' at one of SPUR's first fundraiser Polo matches at Buck's Mill Road in Colts Neck. He demonstrated his balancing abilities, and even got to throw the ball in to start the competition. Justin won ribbons in SPUR horse shows and now can ride



Brooke lead walking for her brother's lesson.

semi-independently. Last year, for the first time, I was his volunteer.

The day I turned 14 was the day I had been waiting for, so I could finally volunteer. Since I do not have a horse of my own, I feel like the horses at Sunnyside are mine. I know and love all of the horses and I appreciate all of their own personalities.

I enjoy working with all the people and horses from SPUR. I sometimes work at camp in the summer and love to see Mimi and Indy sleeping in their stalls early in the morning. I have never met such sweet and gentle horses. I think they have the best home and job they can possibly have.

When I volunteered for one of the group lessons, the mom of the girl I helped told me her daughter had been telling everyone at school about me. This tells me that I was doing exactly what I was trying to do. I try not to only lead the student around the ring, but to help the student learn to ride and have fun!

Justin says he would like to continue to ride with SPUR for as long as he can because it helps him in a lot of ways. I would like to continue to volunteer and maybe even work for the Park System one day. Mom finds just visiting with the horses is therapeutic in itself. I love working with SPUR's staff, students, and horses! Thank you for allowing me to have fun, help others, and to become a better person.

SPUR volunteers must be 14 years old and complete a training class.



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Just a note... Our next issue is Spring 2008. We publish our semi-annual newsletter to keep you informed about all the SPUR news, as well as upcoming events and fund raisers.



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The SPUR Board of Directors, the Sunnyside staff, and the student riders thank the following individuals and organizations for their generous support over the past year.

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Phase II Construction Project Nears Completion



Since the last article about construction in April 2006, so much has changed at Sunnyside: what once was a small mound of dirt, from the groundbreaking of the Phase II project is now turning into a glorious new building! Although there were some delays, we are happy to say that the new construction has taken off. A flurry of activity have taken place through the entire project and watching the building take shape has been amazing.

Construction projects always bring changes to the operation of a program. During the building of Phase II this has meant the regular waiting area being moved into the indoor arena, closing the indoor arena for a week during the installation of the dust suppression system, and the volunteer area being moved to a smaller space. In the end, all of

these changes will make way for one last major change: moving into the new building!

The students, parents, volunteers, staff and even the horses at Sunnyside have been infinitely patient

A large classroom space will offer the opportunity to better accommodate volunteer workshops and other non-riding programs.

with the regular changes to routine that have been necessary to allow the project to move forward. The sounds of construction throughout the day does not seem to bother them, as our four-legged staffers quickly adjusted to the noise and commotion, allowing lessons to continue throughout the entire project.

The new addition includes several new rooms: a waiting and viewing area, an instructors' office, a volunteer room and a formal reception area. New office space will mean the administrative staff will leave their trailer, home since the 2002 move to Sunnyside. A large classroom space will offer the opportunity to better accommodate volunteer workshops and other non-riding programs. An expanded therapy room will offer a quiet space with designated equipment for future programming.

At the time this article was written, construction was not yet complete, but eagerly anticipated for November 2007. We are anxiously awaiting the go-ahead to move into this space. A new chapter in the history of Sunnyside Recreation Area and SPUR will then begin!

