



Submission for Equest Magazine

By: Barbara J. Kimler on behalf of the J.F. Shea Therapeutic Riding Center

Thirty years ago, a social worker named Fran Joswick founded a therapeutic riding program in Orange County, California with just one therapy horse, one rider and two volunteers. Now known as the J.F. Shea Therapeutic Riding Center, the organization is one of the largest and most respected accredited therapeutic riding programs in the county serving over 400 riders per year utilizing 26 horses and over 200 weekly volunteers.

Based on seven acres in the historic city of San Juan Capistrano, the Shea Center is open to any person with a disability who can benefit from therapeutic riding where the horse and activities around the horse are designed to benefit a person with a special need. Riders must be at least two years old and evaluated by licensed physical therapist to determine an appropriate treatment schedule. As a nonprofit organization, the Shea Center offers a sliding scale of fees for those in need of financial assistance.

As many as 60 distinct disabilities are seen at the Shea Center including cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, autism and other sensory integration disorders, Down syndrome, blindness, deafness, spinal cord injuries, head trauma, and stroke to name a few.

Therapeutic riding consists of a trusted partnership between a licensed therapist or trained instructor, well-trained volunteers and one the Shea Center's 26 gentle and patient horses. A horse's three-dimensional walk closely replicates the human walk, helping stimulate the rider's muscle coordination, strength, posture, balance and self-confidence. The special bond that develops between horse and rider also produces emotional and psychological benefits unique to the program that the Center offers.

The Shea Center is certified by the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA) and is one of only three training facilities in the United States that offers a five-week training course. The Shea Center staff consist of 12 full time staff, and seven part time and contract staff. All instructors are NAHRA-certified as are the two physical therapy professionals who perform evaluations, reassessments and individualized treatment programs for their clients.

An internationally recognized organization for its excellence in therapeutic riding programs, the Shea Center is a training facility at the regional, national and international level. Instructor candidates from all over the world visit the Shea Center to participate in a five-week, 200-hour NARHA approved training program.

Due to an increasing demand for their services, a major renovation of the riding facility began in early 2006 with a \$4.5 million equestrian project. The state-of-the-art new equestrian facility consists of two covered arenas, one open arena, a forty-stall barn, two round pens, a shoer and veterinarian area and a riding trail.

During the organization's major fundraiser last September, Shea Center supporters Jenny and Bill Klein made a \$1 million donation and issued an additional \$850,000 challenge grant to fund the second phase of the redevelopment – a \$3.5 million Education & Therapy Center. The \$850,000 challenge grant was met just before midnight on December 31, 2007 and construction plans are now in the works.

The long awaited Education & Therapy Center will provide critical indoor space for physical therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, a parent and community education resource area, rooms for teaching and training rooms and facilities for instructors, staff and volunteers.

For more information about the Shea Center, please contact Dana Butler-Moburg, Executive Director at 949-240-8441 ext. 102 or visit [www.sheacenter.org](http://www.sheacenter.org).

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