

Equine Discovery Center, an unknown jewel in Raymond

By Leslie O'Donnell 8-16-12, Raymond News

For 20 years, Patricia "Tricia" Bridgeo has lived on a large acreage on Old Fremont Road. In between 12-week stints when she was off doing software training and implementation all over the world, she would return to the peaceful setting before heading off to work once again.

But a few years ago, she decided to stay home, and to combine her teaching experience with life on the farm. She renamed the old Silhouette Farm as the Equine Discovery Center, and a new way of life began.

Imagine learning science and math in hands-on activities outdoors, and in the company of horses. Bridgeo offers just that with her enrichment and educational programs centered around horses.

This summer, she partnered with the Raymond School District in a federal 21st Century Program that offered enrichment sessions to local children at her farm. In her "Educational Adventures," Bridgeo focuses lessons in math, science and language around horses. As an example, she cited a class in measurement, with the children learning to measure horses by the standard "hand" method. The children learned new words, including "withers," as part of their language lesson, and used math to convert the hand measurement into feet and inches.



"One week we talked about jobs – the dialogue involved language skills," she explained. "For math, we looked at engineering, and the kids laid out a foundation using stakes and lasers, and my husband dug the hole."

She also offers her program to YMCAs and Boys and Girls Clubs.

Andrea Elliott worked with the summer enrichment program for the Raymond School District this summer.

"We brought the kids to the farm once a week, and it was a good partnership," she said. "I liked how Tricia incorporated so many facets of learning in the program. The kids were in the fresh air, learning about the environment, getting exercise, learning a craft, and getting hands-on experience – and they were having a really good time."

Elliott said the students' parents were invited to a picnic at the farm for the last day of the program. "The kids enjoyed the program, and the parents were very appreciative."

“It’s very hands-on,” she said of the curriculum. “The last day, the students used teamwork to build jumps for the horses.

“Tricia is an amazing person,” she added. “I would go back the first chance I got, and I hope that my child gets to be involved in a program like that.”

Bridgeo’s Educational Adventures are interactive in nature, designed to stimulate curiosity and engage the participants, she said. While she likes to offer her programs at the farm, she also has a mobile classroom with a horse trailer that she can bring to other settings.

A pre-med and biology student in college, Bridgeo began working in the high technology field early on, and went on to teach and train globally in the software field. “My work in software was always centered around teaching,” she said. “I really feel that kids are our future. Being able to use horses and the farm and helping them understand why school is important will help make them productive citizens.

“And it’s a fun way to learn,” she added. “All the modules are flexible for age and experience.”

Asked how long she has been involved with horses, Bridgeo said, “since always. They’re my passion.”

Acknowledging that horses would not sustain the farm financially, she knew she had to work to keep them. “They take time, money and energy,” she said. And with the Equine Discovery Center model, she’s found a way to combine her livelihood with her passion.

The Equine Discovery Center is not just about teaching youngsters. On Wednesday nights, Bridgeo hosts an adult group that goes horseback riding. “People who had not been able to ride since they were kids come out,” she said. “We ride all year, do drill formations, have music.”

Janice Laskey is among those who take classes with Bridgeo on Wednesday nights. “We’re the ‘Young at Heart’ group,” she said. “Most of us are between 40 and 50 years old. It’s a really neat thing – I rode as a little kid and got back into riding 1 ½ years ago. A friend was bringing her son to the Equine Discovery Center and I met Tricia, and she encouraged me to start back with lessons. Before I knew it, I was sucked right back in.”

She is leasing a horse from Bridgeo and now rides three times a week.

“I love it there,” she said. “I’ve become friends with a whole new group of women who share a common interest. We share good conversation – the social part of being part of that group is very important to me.”



Tricia's daughter Sylvia Bridgeo on 8 year old Aero a Morgan cross

With her 14-year-old daughter competing in horse shows, Bridgeo is involved with training as well. Some day, she said, she may enter competitions as well. Among her students are members of the Athletic Equestrian League for grades 4-12; they train to compete six times a year at Dartmouth College. And Bridgeo provides private lessons as well, along with summer camps for children and a program for families.

“We do all the traditional offerings of a horse facility,” she said. “I teach riding, we board horses, we train horses to show, we have a covered arena.”

And she finds time to ride almost every day.

For more information about the Wednesday riding group and other offerings of the Equine Discovery Center, call Bridgeo at 548-1752 or visit her website at www.equinediscoverycenter.com .