

January 11, 2007

LA SELVA BEACH

Special needs horse camp in La Selva gets makeover

BY MEGHA SATYANARAYANA
SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

Thanks to a \$40,000 labor and materials grant, a horse farm for the disabled is getting a life-saving makeover.

By spring 2006, the Monterey Bay Horsemanship and Therapeutic Center's covered arena was so worn, the horses were literally between a rock and hard place. Most of the sand floor had eroded, exposing hard-packed, pebble-laden dirt that hurt the horses' feet.

But the center is run on a bare-bones budget and supported by volunteers, and did not have the money for repairs.

"We were getting desperate," said Anne Phipps, the center's director. "If the program was to continue, we really needed the help"

She appealed to parents of her riders and Granite Construction Co. agreed to donate the time, equipment and supplies needed to rebuild the arena from the ground up.

However, the center, which lies between Manresa and Sunset beaches on a hillside peppered with organic farms, would have to wait until work slowed down enough to free staff and equipment. The deterioration continued and the arena, Phipps said, was soon unusable.

Finally, Tuesday, enormous Granite trucks carrying nearly 400 tons of dust-free sand started rumbling down San Andreas Road and up the winding path to the center.

The "extreme makeover" had begun.

Rebuilding the arena is a huge project. The space is about 1,500 square feet, and Phipps said the sand needs to be 4 inches deep. The stables once housed a dairy farm, and are built on a slight hillside, which aids drainage, but the arena needs to be level.

The bottom is lined with a metal pan that lays along the incline, said foremen Andy Wootton and Marty Herman. This promotes drainage when the top sand gets wet. Then the base material, a sand engineered to pack well, is laid down. Finally, natural sand from Granite's Felton quarry, washed repeatedly to remove dust and fine particles, is lain on top.

This is the first time the crew has rebuilt a riding arena and if all goes well, said Herman, the project should be completed by today.

The 25 horses at the center are part of a physical and mental therapy program for handicapped children and adults. Many ride several times a week, said Phipps, and learn to use their muscles, and their minds, to better guide the horse.

In turn, she said, the horses' behavior guides the riders.

"Horses have an ability to transfer — you know, they're quiet — their emotions," said Phipps.

Brett Wright, a patient, concentrates on watching machinery roll over the sand, flattening it. He is 21, and has been riding horses since he was 15. He wants to be the first person to ride on the new arena, he said. With help from Nolan Sands, the facility's manager, Wright counts fingers and said he rides six days a week.

"Feels like you're flying," he said.

Wright's transition has been remarkable, said his mother, Gail. He arrived with behavior problems. Now, he drives the tractor to lay hay in the arena. He has become a leader to the other patients.

"The program empowers them to do things other people take for granted," she said.

Contact Megha Satyanarayana at jcopeland@santacruzsentinel.com.

Monterey Bay Horsemanship and Therapeutic Center

WHAT: Teaches Western and English riding to those with special needs.

WHERE: 783 San Andreas Road, La Selva.

information: or to volunteer, call 761-1142 or visit <http://www.mhorsecenter.com>