



Healing through Horses

Ann Lally 4049064487
Annlally1@gmail.com
 Trish Gross: 2068505686
director@chastainhorspark.org

Record Demand for Therapeutic Horsemanship Drives Chastain Horse Park \$9 Million Expansion

*Capital Campaign Groundbreaking Wednesday, August 24 with Atlanta Mayor
 Andre Dickens and City of Atlanta Dept. of Parks & Recreation*

Atlanta, GA – After a 46% increase in demand for therapeutic riding sessions last year, Chastain Horse Park (CHP) is planning for exponential growth within its therapeutic programs. This will translate to more than 5,000 sessions in 2022, 36% of which will be subsidized by non-profit CHP and its partners. To double impact of the program, the new facility will enable the campus to shift its focus from individual to group sessions and broaden its community outreach to include additional underserved and at-risk individuals. It is one of only two remaining urban horse parks in the U.S. and is Premiere Accredited by Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH), International.

COVID triggered increased interest in outdoor activities and therapies across the board, including demand for outdoor activities with horses. Serious physical and mental health issues have also grown with COVID. Along with facility rental, paid horse boarding and riding lessons help support scholarships for equine assisted services, which many insurance companies still consider “investigative” despite compelling outcomes data. Other scholarship supporters include Boehringer Ingelheim’s BI Cares Foundation (animal and human pharmaceuticals), Junior League, RISE Scholarship Foundation and many other donors.

Why the Horse?

“The horse’s brain has a large limbic system. Size-wise, the horse cerebellum accounts for about a third of the horse’s brain. And, because the horse is a motor/sensory animal, the horse is all but ruled by the cerebellum. Humans, on the other hand, are ruled by the frontal lobe. You could interpret this as humans being more of a “thinking” species, while horses are more of a sensory and feelings species. Horses have an amazing network of neurons governing emotionality that give them a remarkable ability to read human feeling and intention—and respond to it,” says Kelcy Rainer, CHP Therapeutic Program Director. They are herd and prey animals – not predators -- which means that they have a strong emotional sense and use this sense as a survival tool; Additionally, the horse’s gait mimics the movement of the human body and thus acts as a 3-dimensional form of modality when working with physical and cognitive disabilities.

“Horses never hide their emotions. Because of these qualities, horses can be used to help people heal from a variety of physical and psychological issues. Horses are an incredible partner in improving the physical and cognitive wellbeing of humans while also being an emotional mirror helping participants identify their feelings,” continues Rainer.

The 15-acre campus is devoted to a mission that “empowers individuals of all abilities through life changing relationships with horses.” It has inspired not only a large volunteer corps, but employees who have found that marrying their passion for horses with work in the non-profit arena satisfies a strong desire to work for the greater good of people with special needs.

For example, Rainer, a 10-year veteran of CHP, was an internationally recognized Saddlebred competitor with a lifelong love of horses. She is also a PATH, International Advanced Certified instructor and knew from an early age that she wanted to blend two passions for career satisfaction: her commitment to social activism with her love of horsemanship. Trish Gross, CHP’s Executive Director and a former technology executive, wanted to learn to ride after her husband’s job led them from California to Atlanta. While taking lessons at CHP, she became inspired and sought out an opportunity to lead the organization.

“We are a strong community of people who are committed to serving children, teens, and adults with physical cognitive and emotional disabilities in a unique setting. CHP is in Chastain Park, a City of Atlanta Park campus offering baseball and football fields, a golf course, a pool, tennis courts, and walking paths. Horses dedicated to the common good and welfare of the community always add interest and excitement to the park. Combine that with Georgia’s growing population of individuals with disabilities, our capital campaign came at the perfect time,” adds Trish Gross, Executive Director.

New and Expanded Facilities

The expansion is the result of a successful “Healing Through Horses” capital campaign that will renovate and grow facilities and help underwrite therapeutic sessions for City of Atlanta residents, many of whose household incomes are under \$28,600.

Gross believes a new therapeutic horsemanship center, including clinical and educational spaces, could inspire healthcare professionals to embrace the role of the horse in therapeutic services. She is also hopeful that the center’s work and outcomes will help persuade insurers to consider reimbursement for such services.

She said, “A horse’s response to a client helps to inform the therapist or instructor what physical and cognitive challenges are present, or which behaviors to discuss. If you watch a session in action, it’s hard not to wonder, ‘who’s the therapist here, the horse, or the therapist?’ Horses are sentient, and while clients might not appear ready to discuss issues facing them. The horse is ready to accept and communicate.”

The invitation-only groundbreaking ceremony takes place Wednesday, August 24 will launch the largest initiative for CHP since it began in 1939, enabling it to scale rapidly to meet demand.

Editors’ Fact Sheet Attached