

Healing Reins riders competed

Some participants in Healing Reigns Therapeutic Riding Center's riding program have advanced to a whole new level of horsemanship competition. In May, nine Healing Reins riders competed in a dressage show at Bend's Horse Butte Equestrian Center hosted by the Central Oregon Dressage Club.

The competition offered main stream dressage classes, as well as an adaptive dressage class for Healing Reins riders with physical and special needs. Healing Reins entered three riders in to the adaptive class and six into customary competition. According to executive director Betsy Jacobson-Warren, the event was a huge moment for Healing Reins as it was the first time the Central Oregon Dressage Club has included an adaptive dressage class as a part of an official show.

Healing Reins competitors are becoming accomplished riders in their own rights able to ride on their own without the support of a volunteer. They did really well. There were lots of ribbons and great scores, said Healing Reins program director Penny Campbell. They are very good riders, said Jacobson-Warren.

Healing Reins philosophy is that competition is a very healthy part of life. Competition is a big part of the process of riding horses. When you get to a certain ability, then the logical extension is to go out and show that ability and compete, said Campbell.

As a means of providing its riders the opportunity to experience the thrill that competition brings, Healing Reins offers two in-house horse shows every year. Riders have the opportunity to demonstrate their riding skills to the community, family and friends and experience the thrill of accomplishment. We have real judges with real ribbons for first through fifth places. They get to ride their horse in the ring, and then we do a trail class, and now we're adding a dressage class, Campbell said. Normally, 30 to 40 riders participate. Their disabilities are numerous and some riders are even normally confined to wheel chairs.

Competition builds Healing Reins riders' confidence and self-esteem. They forget about their disability for a while when they're up on the horse. ... (When riding, a disabled person) can do anything that anyone else can do, said Jacobson-Warren.

Many of the competitors do not have the opportunity participate in regular, traditional sports activities in school They don't have the muscle strength or the cognitive ability, said Jacobson-Warren. The opportunity to excel at something and the ability to form a relationship with and work with an animal that is so many more times their weight and size offers them a huge sense of accomplishment and the ability to be very good at something that maybe their peers are not or their parents are not.

Jacobson told the Central Oregon Horse Journal that Central Oregon Dressage Club organizers commented about the level of professionalism that Healing Reins riders exhibited and how they acted as though they had shown all of their lives. They weren't too nervous. They just got on their horses and did their warm-ups, and they showed really well and handled it really beautifully, said Jacobson.

Healing Reins winners in Horse Butte Equestrian Center by class were: Intro A, junior rider - Alicia Ostrander-1st; Adaptive Dressage - Heather McCoy-1st, Megan Ruth 1st, Madison Engle-1st; Training Level Test , junior rider Christina Kuehne-1st, Teresa Baur-2nd, Marissa Kuehne-3rd, Lauren Smejkal-5th.

Tia Duerrmeyer