



# Horses for Heroes Thrives at Healing Reins Therapeutic Riding Center

BY SONDRA HOLTZMAN DISCOVERY FEATURE WRITER

For the first time since its inception in 1999, Healing Reins Therapeutic Riding Center in Bend is partnering with the Portland Veterans Administration in a unique event called Horses for Heroes.

This special interactive workshop, which takes place May 18, 19 and 20 at the Healing Reins barn in southeast Bend, is geared toward veterans of the wars, most of whom suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury.

“Healing Reins Therapeutic Riding Center offers therapeutic riding and equine-facilitated learning opportunities for youth and adults with cognitive, physical and behavioral disabilities,” says Executive Director Dita Keith.

“The Veterans Administration is working with us to develop and effectively implement this unique opportunity. While they are here, the participants will partake of both therapeutic riding and un-mounted (equine-facilitated learning) activities and will be accompanied by therapists and staff from the Portland Veterans Administration and assisted by the Bend VA Clinic.”

Aside from the event being the first of its kind at Healing Reins, the veterans who are part of Horses

for Heroes are all female. “People don’t automatically think of women when the word ‘veteran’ is used,” says Keith.

“We created this workshop to assist eight veterans and the first people to sign up were all women. Many female veterans suffer from substance and other abuses related to their service. We see this event as a great opportunity to highlight the female as veteran – it’s a chance for these women to take the work they’ve already begun in standard group therapy to a whole new level. Our unique environment, coupled with the horse as partner creates an experiential learning opportunity that will help them to resolve a variety of issues.”

As additional support for the program, Jeff Colker of the Comfort Inn and Suites has extended a room discount and participants will receive complimentary passes to the High Desert Museum, along with other planned activities.

“The therapeutic experience will involve the horses, instructors and anywhere from one to three volunteers to support each participant,” shares Keith. “Most of these women are physically able but have been mentally traumatized. Here at Healing Reins, we do something every



Jake Jakubic on True Vol, Dina Barker & Lauren Smejkal  
Photo courtesy of Healing Reins Therapeutic Riding Center

year to honor our country’s veterans. This year, we’re trying to implement a program that is nationally recognized by the North American Riding For the Handicapped Association,

under whose national auspices we are a Premier Accredited Center.” Scheduled activities include a daily mounted lesson, mounted interaction and ground activities



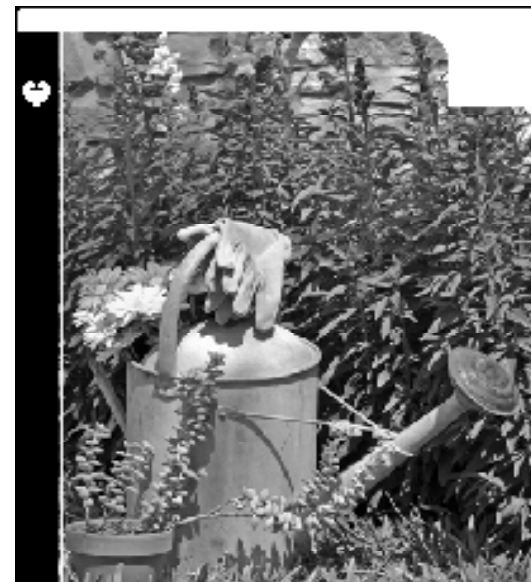
War Veterans & Horses at Healing Reins  
Photo courtesy of Healing Reins Therapeutic Riding Center

that include team building and self-awareness exercises, which aid in discovering what could be holding an individual back from a full recovery.

Armed with the mission to ‘...heal with horses,’ Healing Reins Therapeutic Riding Center is offering this unique, three-day workshop to address goals such as communication, trust and impulse modulation.

According to Keith, horses’ sensitivity to non-verbal communication assists patients in developing greater awareness of their emotions, the non-verbal cues they may be communicating and the important role of non-verbal communication in relationships. “Learning to trust an animal such as a horse also aides in the development and restoration of trust of those whose ability to trust has been violated by difficult life experiences,” says Keith. “While here at Healing Reins, these eight women will be in good company. A number of our volunteers are veterans themselves and are eager to assist them in their work. It’s an opportunity for all of us to embrace those who have served to protect our freedom and give them something in return.”

Information: 541/382-9410 and [www.healingreins.org](http://www.healingreins.org)



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