

MET Messenger



ANNUAL
NEWSLETTER 2015

ADVOCATE • ENHANCE • PROTECT

Magic in the Making: The Masterson Station Park Equestrian Program

By Nancy Bower Bowling

It all started in the early 1970s with a vision that Liz Rood had for the city of Lexington's newly acquired Masterson Station Park: Offer an equestrian program to local residents, funded by Parks and Recreation, that included horsemanship lessons and other educational opportunities at a very affordable price.



Birgid Niedenzu helping student with Tuppence.
MSP summer camp, 1990.

The program began with limited facilities at the back of the park: a small storage building, a few tie areas, and one lesson ring. Now, more than 40 years later, The Masterson Station Park Equestrian Program is still offering affordable lessons on safe horses. Marty Truax (Instructor 1971-1985) recalls that although the program began small, the standards were high. "We taught every day in britches and tall boots, regardless of the temperature," she said. "It was a quality program from day one."

The program that started small quickly increased in size. Liz soon hired Allison Prewitt Turnbull (Program Assistant 1975-77 and Director 1977-1984) to assist with running the program. Allison remembers, "Under the energetic instruction of dedicated horsewomen, our lessons soon extended to three rings, staying busy morning, noon and evenings. Our herd of exceptional horses grew to 32 mighty steeds that carried beginner, intermediate and advanced riders."

In the winter months an equine lecture series was offered through Transylvania University, and additional continuing education classes for students were held in the evening in the park office. (See Allison's full story as well as many other heartwarming stories at MastersonEquestrian.org.)

Masterson Equestrian Trust Foundation is a nonprofit foundation dedicated to the preservation of Masterson Station Park for use by all equestrian enthusiasts and to the improvement and enhancement of facilities and services available to the equestrian public. MET acts as an advocate for all MSP equine enthusiasts, thus strengthening Lexington's distinction as the Horse Capital of the World.



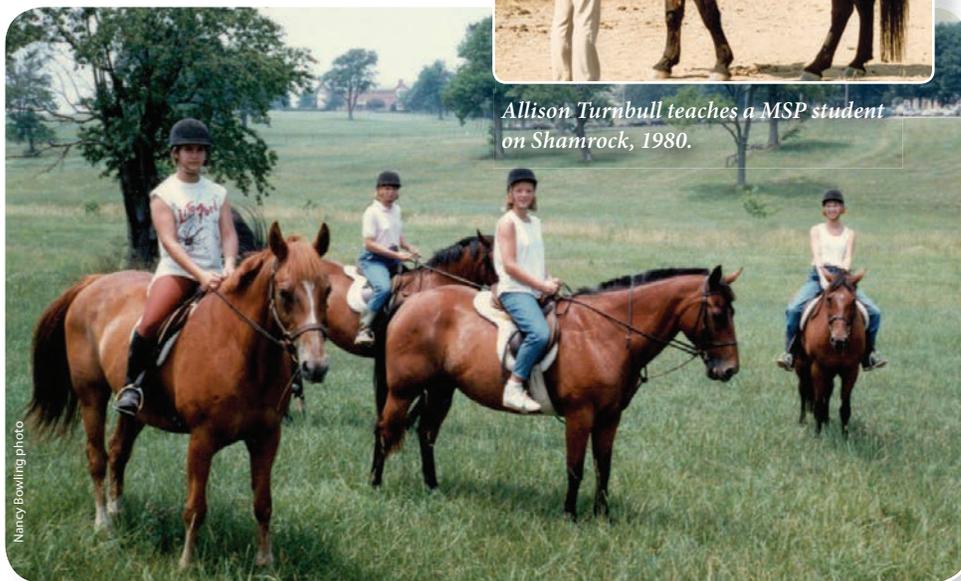
mastersonEquestrian.org

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The range of riding classes for individuals with special needs grew as well, with the therapeutic program gaining certification by PATH (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship), formerly NARHA (North American Riding for the Handicapped Association). Paula Pulliam (Instructor 1976-1985) remembers a park where on “public dedicated land, horsemanship and competitions showcasing the equine industry existed before the Kentucky Horse Park was even an idea.” She asks, “Where in any other state would you find a Parks Department with the foresight to fund an equestrian program affording the opportunity for children and adults to take quality horsemanship classes at unbelievably low rates? A program of high caliber [Lexington would expect nothing less] providing the general public the opportunity to become educated in the basics through high level instruction, taking the learning further while glean- ing the ins and outs of responsible horse ownership, does not exist anywhere else. Bravo to Lexington!”

Elaine Schott became Program Assistant and then Director in 1985 and by the mid-1980s, 50 to 60 group lessons per week, servicing over 250 local residents, were taught each session and there was still a waiting list. Classes were so popular that



MSP student trail ride, 1987.



MSP students with instructors (L/R) Christy Schneider Douglas, Nancy Bowling (author), Rebecca Swingle. Summer camp, 1993.

students and their parents would arrive at 4 a.m. to stand in line for the 9 a.m. registration to ensure a spot in a class.

I joined the program as an Instructor and then Program Assistant in the mid-1980s. I remember a program in full swing, and well supported by the local horse community. Instructors ranged from Graduate A Pony Club members to adult students that had come up through the program. In addition, a large group of dedicated

volunteers helped with the therapeutic classes, horse care and many other duties. A working student program and summer camp gave advanced riders that had come up through the ranks a place to continue to grow. The program had outgrown its budget but many individuals in the local horse community offered their support helping with the activities the program organized. Volunteers helped with the spring hunter show, and the Blue Grass State Games. Professional equestrians gave dressage and jumping clinics. The resulting profits were donated back to the program and used to buy another quality horse or new helmets for the students. My strongest memories, the ones that still touch my heart today, are of the remarkable power of the horse to transform the lives of those the program served and those of us that worked in it. We all felt something powerful was shaping us and that the empowering effects of the horse as the true teachers of life’s lessons—be it trust, courage, clarity and/or love—weren’t just benefiting the students. The days of hard work involved in running a large riding program were filled with experiences that words fail to describe. Magic happened and we were all there to witness it. Magic happened when an autistic teenager climbed in the saddle after three years of encouragement; when a shy child too scared to walk up to the barn the first day of class blossomed into a skilled rider and gained the confidence to go on to vet school. Magic happened when a high school kid from a



Allison Turnbull teaches a MSP student on Shamrock, 1980.

tough neighborhood went from skipping class to near perfect attendance so he could ride on Friday, and when an adult rider who had lost her nerve over fences overcame her fears to progress to jumping the park's outside hunter course.

Margi Stickney (Instructor 1988-1990) remembers her favorite classes to teach were adult beginners. "Students were often terrified to ride because of some negative experiences years ago and they appreciated so much the need to understand the horse's behavior, as opposed to just getting up there and pushing buttons. It was very rewarding for me to watch their skills improve weekly." The Masterson magic has happened over all these years because of an incredible team of hardworking horses, volun-



*Helmut Graetz, MSP
XC Course designer/builder, USPC clinician, 2007.*

teers, and staff (both equestrian and maintenance). Margi remembers, "We all worked VERY hard and for much less per hour than we could have made teaching lessons on our own, but I so appreciated the opportunity that Parks and Recreation gave to so many in the community that never would have had an opportunity to ride otherwise. We always called it 'the best kept secret in Lexington.'"

Carol Jones has been a longtime supporter of both the equestrian facilities and the program. She notes, "Masterson Park has given so much back to the community, a place where horse people have a

lovely place to ride, meet friends, go to clinics and shows, intermingle with joggers, picnickers, soccer players and dog walkers—a great park for everyone. The Parks and Recreation riding program has given citizens with a limited knowledge of horses a chance to be around horses, learn to ride, and enjoy kind animals in a lovely setting with wonderful instructors and volunteers."

Today the equine program has gained increased visibility. More people are using the park for recreational activities that don't include riding horses. Adults and children who would otherwise never see a horse experience the thrill of watching a rider gallop across the field or have the opportunity to pet a horse tied to a trailer. The increased traffic and further

development both within and around the park make running a quiet riding program more challenging, but the program still serves many local residents each year. Georgia Ockerman (Program Director since 1988) notes, "The program is constantly being adjusted to meet the needs and desires of the community. We will be adding summer camp back next year. We are trying to accommodate as many people as possible."

But while many things have changed over the course of 40 plus years, the enjoyment of riding in the Masterson Equestrian Program continues. An adult student recently posted on Facebook, "The nicest thing about riding at Masterson is the horses always seem so happy!"

The "magic of Masterson" will continue with the dedicated support of those who believe in the transformative power of the horse and human partnership. Allison remembers that she and Elaine Schott used to say that if they had but one day left to live, it would be on a horse at Masterson Station Park... and they would be smiling.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Nancy Bower Bowling was fortunate to be a part of the program for nine years as an Instructor and Program Assistant (1987-1993) in the good company of extraordinary horses, volunteers, and staff. She feels honored to serve now on the MET board with a group of passionate individuals who spend a lot of time and energy maintaining and improving the equestrian facilities at MSP.



Dorothy Curlin assisting in MSP therapeutic class with Buckwheat, 1990.

Save the Dates 2016

APRIL 9-10

Spring Bay Horse Trials

APRIL 16-17

MET Benefit Hunter Jumper Show

MAY 14

Annual Sayre Horse Show

JUNE-AUGUST

Summerbird Dressage
(Wednesday evenings)

JUNE 18-19

MidSouth Tetrathlon Rally

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER

MET Annual Workday

NOVEMBER 6

MET Annual Hunter Pace

Watch our Facebook page and website for more details.



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–Holly Armstrong Wiemers**

**"The best thing ever!"
–Joy Hohenshelt**



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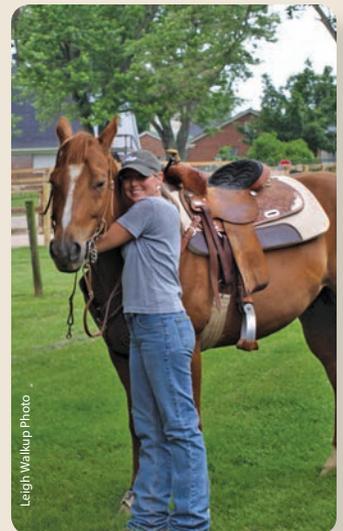
Consider making a donation to Masterson Equestrian Trust Foundation.

Your gift will go toward improving and maintaining the equine facilities at Masterson Station Park, a gift that keeps on giving.

Go to masterson-equestrian.org today to donate online or print out a donation form.



masterson-equestrian.org



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President's letter

During my time on the MET board, I have come to learn that the equestrian facilities at Masterson Station Park have a significant impact on the equestrian community. How many of our horses, like mine, jumped their first fence on the outdoor hunter course or crossed their first creek at Masterson? How many local professionals got their start in the Masterson riding program? How many generations of equestrians have learned to be good horseman at the shows, clinics and camps held on Masterson's grounds? We are very fortunate to have a facility like this is our own backyard. In the next year, I encourage each of you to seek ways that you can help keep the magic of the equestrian facilities at Masterson Station Park alive for ourselves and future equestrians to come.

Happy Trails,
Jill Stowe



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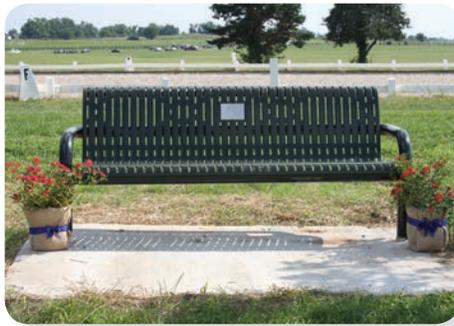
Your Donations and Volunteer Hours at Work in 2015



Painting judges' box at dressage complex.



Bluegrass Pony Club treats the new Alltech bourbon barrel jump in preparation for installation.



John Wiggs memorial bench at dressage complex.



Cleaning up XC fences during annual workday.

...and of course many hours mowing and weedeating throughout the year!

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