

## Kids & Horses

4-H horse programs provide sturdy foundations of horsemanship, which link to an abundance of life skills.

### By Summer Best

Beth Ann Graves studied the horse in front of her, nodded kindly to the exhibitor, and scratched a few notes on her notepad. Here she was, judging the saddle seat division at the Florida State 4-H Horse Show. My, how the years had flown!

A nice, straight row of neatly groomed horses and 4-H exhibitors stood at attention, ready for Beth Ann to judge, and she made her way carefully to each one, offering a thoughtful word or smile to the exhibitors as she graded the class. 4-H youth

“ Every kid needs to do 4-H,” Beth Ann says. “When I was in 4-H, I had such a good time showing, doing the 4-H project books and learning about other disciplines through the events. It’s something all the kids need to experience because it’s so much fun.”

From 1982-1989, Beth Ann moved through the 4-H ranks, consistently becoming one of the South’s best saddle seat riders. In 1988, she celebrated a pinnacle year, going undefeated in saddle seat events at the Southern Regional 4-H Show – the highest level of 4-H horse showing offered.

Today, Beth Ann’s skills learned in 4-H continue to pay off. After graduating from college in 1992 with an accounting degree, she began training horses, which led to a nationally competitive career. The demands of riding, training, showing and giving lessons at her home in Clearwater, Florida, keep her busy, but she has already decided to volunteer even more time to her local 4-H horse programs in Pinellas County.

“ I’d like to see if I can be of some help,” she says. “My parents were always volunteering when I was in 4-H. They would put on clinics, Dad would judge shows and even donate hauling to regionals (Southern Regional 4-H Horse Show) or other events to help make it more affordable for other 4-H kids. And they always had a good time doing it.”

### The Value

Beth Ann’s positive, “give back” attitude about 4-H is a common one – and her willingness to volunteer is one of the biggest reasons 4-H is such a successful youth development program.

“A lot of volunteers have children involved in 4-H, then when their children graduate, the volunteers continue coming back to help with 4-H,” says Dr. Sandra TenBroeck, University of Florida Associate Professor and Extension Equine Specialist.

“4-H becomes a family. Often your volunteer leader is your mentor, your role model, the person who inspires you. It really is a family. And when horses are involved, you need to have the support and leadership of adults.”

If you sign on as a volunteer 4-H leader, you're in big company. Last year, 761,242 volunteer leaders promoted 4-H nationwide. 4-H youth

### TenBroeck's Tips

Think you've got what it takes to become a 4-H volunteer or 4-H volunteer leader? Fantastic! Equine Specialist Dr. Sandra TenBroeck offers thoughts to get you started.

- Contact your county extension office.

Ask to speak with the 4-H agent or the person involved in youth leadership, and let them know you'd like to get involved. There is a screening process, so inquire to see if you qualify. Identify other parents like yourself who can be involved in the program.

- Your time is valuable.

Consider how you can impact youth and community with your time. One of the biggest stumbling blocks to being involved as a leader is time. Time is my most precious resource, and what we do with our time is truly an investment. What are you investing your time in? Is it something that's going to give you fruit right now, or is it long-term fruit? 4-H helps build a sense of community. When you volunteer for 4-H, you aren't just investing in youth, you're investing in community pride and the future.

- Develop a Plan

As a 4-H volunteer leader, you don't have to do everything yourself. Identify yourself as a team. If you're a good planner but not a good executor, find someone to work with you who is a fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants, get-it-done person. The two of you together will do great things. Then, everyone benefits.

- Ask Questions.

Develop a good relationship with your county 4-H agent. Ask questions. Pursue. Be informed. If someone is not informing you, then seek it out. You might have to make phone calls, go to the Internet, read the newspaper to find out what resources are available to you to lead your 4-H

group. Because 4-H is an extension service, you have access to university information and services.

- Dig in.

The horse project is a very vast project – it deals with leadership, citizenship, anything related to family and growth. Green is for growth. 4-H is a vehicle to adulthood. The experiences we try to offer in our programs will expose kids to things they need in adulthood. Find your niche as a volunteer, and go for it! horse heads

### Kid Magnets

When God created horses, surely He clocked some overtime planning the details.

What other creature has the perfect balance of grace and delicacy, poised proportionately with an otherwise brawny body? No other animal appears to be as interesting, intelligent, charismatic and simultaneously useful in quite the same way.

On top of that, horses seem to have built-in allure that draws us directly to them.

“Horses are kid magnets,” Dr. TenBroek says. “Kids and horses are sort of a natural.”

Dr. TenBroek notes that horses, (via riding, training, showing or day-to-day care), can teach youths and adults infinite life skills.

“Fun. Therapy. Athletics. Getting out of the house. Responsibility. Time management. Nurturing. Powers of observation. Learning animal and people behavior. Dealing with disappointment. Setting goals. Planning. Executing. Leadership. The list goes on and on,” she says. “Realistically, it could be a rabbit or a dog or a cow, but the horse offers unique things that some of our other species animals don’t.”

### No Horse? No Worries.

You don’t have to own a horse to be involved in the 4-H Horse Program. 4-H offers multiple programs for horse enthusiasts. From county council and 4-H Congress, to horse quiz bowl, hippology, horseman of the year competitions, horse program advancement programs and horse camp, opportunities are available for youth to learn and grow. 4-H links

### 4-H Numbers & Names

The 4-H Horse Program is one of the largest 4-H programs in the country, with thousands of members involved on various levels. In fact, 276,953 members participated nationwide in 4-H horse projects in 2002. At the

Florida 4-H State Horse Show alone, 290 members and horses qualified, representing 39 counties. From the state show, 42 seniors (exhibitors age 13 and older) qualified to attend the Southern Regional 4-H Horse Show held July 30-August 3 in Perry, Georgia.

4-H horse programs nationwide are the second-largest animal projects available in 4-H, next to poultry science and embryology.

You might recognize the names of these successful 4-H alumni.

Politicians, like Senators Bob Graham, Bill Nelson and Sam Nunn, Representative Adam Putnam, Georgia Governor Roy Barnes, First Lady Rosalynn Carter, Representative Bill Chapell, Representative Charles Hatcher, Representative Earl Hutto, Representative Ed Jenkins, Jacqueline Kennedy-Onassis, Garfield comic strip creator Jim Davis, and many, many more. Join the club!

### Horse Industry's Future

In the first half of the 20th century, Hollywood western star Roy Rogers and his keen horse, "Trigger," regularly galloped across the silver screen, and the world understood what it meant to be a cowboy. Years later, the famous talking palomino, Mr. Ed, entertained America on T.V. sets at home, and girls and boys begged moms and dads to put horses in their backyards, too.

Families loved horses. Kids wanted horses.

Other equines in mainstream media continued to charm the nation.

Remember My Friend Flicka? Don't forget Misty of Chincoteague, Black Beauty, The Black Stallion and an endless list of equine titles.

Horse stories are harder to come by today. Mainstream America might recall "Cisco" from Dances with Wolves, "Pilgrim" from The Horse Whisperer or "Spirit" and "Rain" from the cartoon movie, Spirit. This year, Seabiscuit will be a well-known horse.

Still, youth today are influenced by far fewer horses than their parents and grandparents. Where have all the cowboys gone? Where are the youngsters who dream of becoming jockeys and rough riders and steeplechase champions? How will this influence the future of the horse industry?

Take another look at your T.V. set – the programming probably isn't cowboys and Indians, talking horses and National Velvet. It's probably video games and MTV, sitcoms with no animals and sci-fi or murder mysteries. Motivate your children to join 4-H or other youth development programs, and make the best better by securing the future.

### Supporting 4-H

Seminole Feed, the official feed sponsor of the Florida 4-H State Horse

Show, believes strongly in youth development programs and is proud to support 4-H horse programs throughout the Southeast. If your 4-H horse program or 4-H horse show has a need for sponsorship, please call 1-800-683-1881. Seminole Feed also offers free Nutrition Seminars, free New Horse Owner Seminars and numerous additional funding opportunities.