

PN

Veterans Holidays

Where's the respect?

Faith and Disabilities

How times have changed

Long-term Caregivers

Acknowledge yourself!

HORSES FOR THERAPY

Riding High! (p. 66)



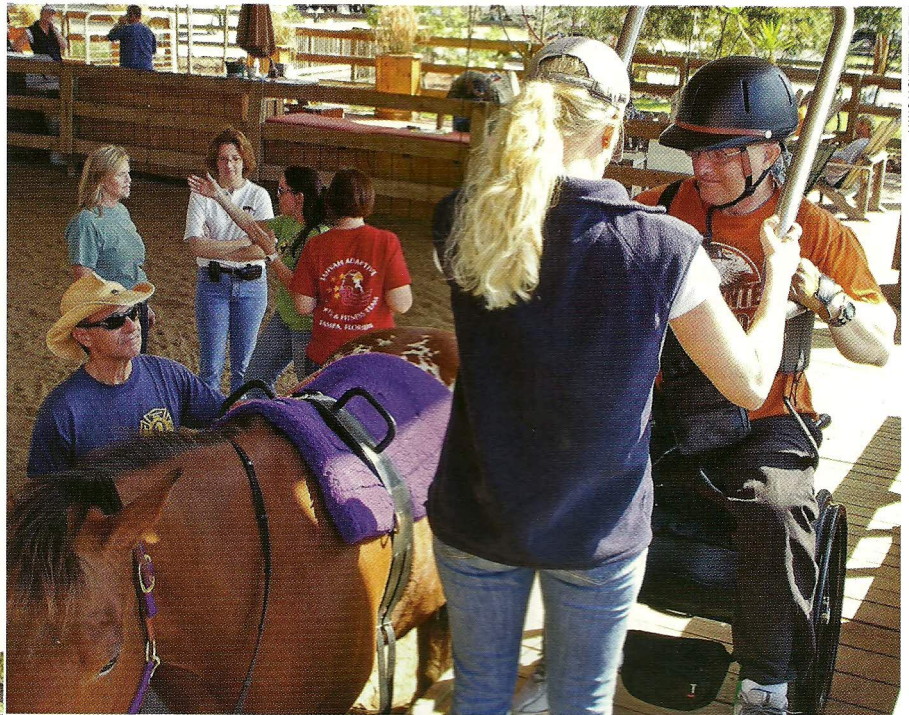
Taking a Quantum Leap

Army Chaplain (Major) Lee Nelson was born a military brat in Fort Walton Beach, Fla. In summer 2009, Nelson left his home in a small Italian village to drive his motorcycle to his duty station. He met a semi-truck on the road and woke up six weeks later in the spinal-cord-injury unit at James A. Haley VA Hospital in Tampa. His spine was severed at T11.

One of the hospital's recreation therapists suggested Nelson join the therapeutic horseback-riding program. His first thought was, *How on earth am I going to stay on a horse? I can't grip with my legs. I can't even keep myself upright in my wheelchair without side supports.* His response was, "If you get me up there, you are going to get real tired of catching me as I fall off."

But, a seed was planted. Nelson saw some of the other wounded troops going on outings to Quantum Leap Farm to ride. They came back with stories of the horses and other animals on the farm. It sounded like a place of healing away from the hospital. He finally decided if they could do it, he could, too.

Nelson started off on a model horse in the physical therapy room at the hospital to get used to how riding felt. He knew the real thing would be much more difficult. I watched as Nelson was



Quantum Leap Farm, a nonprofit therapeutic horseback-riding program in Odessa, Fla., offers riding opportunities to people with disabilities.

an accomplished rider, as well as an EAGALA (Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association) certified mental-health counselor and equine specialist. She has been coaching Nelson twice a month for the past year.

Do you know... the riding has strengthened Nelson's core muscles and he no longer needs side supports on his wheelchair to keep him upright? He told me it is all about getting strong and having fun at the same time.

In 2000, Edie Ebbert Dopking, PhD, started teaching adults with disabilities to ride and drive carriages on her farm. She had a dream to use her farm for the benefit of others. Quantum Leap Farm (www.quantumleapfarm.org) was born, a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization situated on 11 acres of land in Odessa, Fla. The

put into a SureHands® lift at Quantum Leap Farm and transferred from his wheelchair to the horse. He prefers to ride with just a blanket and strap—no saddle for him. This forces him to use his core muscles for balance.

Jenna Miller put Nelson through his paces in the ring. A person is on each side of him in case he slips off, as well as someone holding a lead for safety.

About 9,000 skilled volunteers provide support to the program each year. It's about safety first, says Miller. She is

county just bought the surrounding 1,700 acres, and it will be a nature preserve open to riders. The therapeutic and recreational riding program is just one of Quantum's many services, and you don't have to ride a horse to participate.

Programs include kinesthetic therapy, which is goal-directed and conducted in the barn and barnyard areas. These sessions are geared toward people with new or unstable injuries. Once you receive a doctor's clearance, you may participate in the carriage-driving program and/or move on to the hippotherapy program. These are directed by a licensed physical therapist, Lynn Bankston. She and participants set specific treatment goals, and the horses are part of the treatment to work toward the

goals, which include balance, proprioception, range of motion, strengthening, and endurance.

The "At EASE" program just hosted its fourth annual retreat for WOW (Women of Warriors). This event focuses on education, support, and self-exploration for the women who care for wounded soldiers. This program draws women from all over the country.

A palliative care program, in conjunction with the Bay Pines (Fla.) VA hospital hospice unit, features carriage riding and grooming the many animals that live at the farm.

If you can't make it to Florida, check out these websites to find an accredited program in your area: EAGALA (www.eagala.org) and Certified Horsemanship

Questions & Answers

Tell me about things that have made your life easier! If you need answers for obstacles, I would be pleased to do the research and see if we can make life a bit better for all of us.

Contact: alder0720@tampabay.rr.com.

Association (www.cha-ahse.org), which certifies instructors of riders with disabilities (IRD Instructor). This website lists all the accredited programs in the country. ■