

Horse ministry offers hope, friendship

Kim Tschirret, 32, always knew life would lead her back to horses. After growing up showing Saddlebreds, Tschirret branched out to find a "real job."

Now she finds herself surrounded by the four legged companions once again.

Tschirret is the owner and director of Hope Reins of Raleigh, a 32-acre Christian equine ministry in the heart of North Raleigh, that pairs rescued horses with children ages 5 to 18 who are neglected, abused, ill or live in an at-risk environment.



Tschirret is taking advantage of North Carolina's tax-free weekend as an opportunity to inform the community about Hope Reins.

Triangle Horse Sports is hosting a "bridle shower" to benefit Hope Reins from noon to 5 p.m. today. This is a chance for people moved by the farm's cause to shower Hope Reins' newly rescued horses, Gabe, Isaiah, Shiloh, Esther and Sonny with much needed supplies.

"The community can come to Triangle Horse Sports, eat some apple pie and carrot cake, and learn about what Hope Reins of Raleigh is trying to accomplish," Tschirret said.

Tschirret believes in the therapeutic qualities of horses. During a troubled childhood, Tschirret turned to her high-stepping Saddlebreds for a source of honesty and friendship.

"I can remember sitting in my horse's stall and feeling like it was the only place that I felt comfort and safety," Tschirret said.

Though Tschirret's farm is a horse-loving child's paradise, it serves a higher purpose than just teaching children how to master riding. Hope Reins utilizes horses' sensitive and intuitive nature to connect with children that have shut themselves off from society.

Most of Tschirret's horses, dubbed "equine counselors," come from local rescue organizations that have rehabilitated them from a neglected or abusive past. These horses share a unique bond with children who come from similar backgrounds.

"Many times, when a child learns of a rescued horse's painful past, they are stirred with compassion and are then able to relate their own sorrowful feelings and anguish," Tschirret said.

Tschirret has modeled Hope Reins after Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch, a similar farm in Oregon. Kim Meeder, the founder of Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch, and author of "Hope Rising," inspired Tschirret to start a farm of her own.

"Meeder's philosophy and stories recorded in 'Hope Rising' struck such a nerve with me," Tschirret said. "It reminded me of personal experiences and showed me how I could combine my love of horses with helping others."

Tschirret offers sessions Wednesday mornings and Thursday evenings, and she hopes to expand these times in the near future. A typical session will include a farm chore, basic horse care and horsemanship, grooming, riding, a fun activity and a time of devotion.

Each child is partnered with a particular leader and horse for 90 minutes. This provides for a customized session that is geared toward the child's specific needs.

"Neglected children seem to feel as if no one wants to be around them," Tschirret said.

"Consequently, they are moved by the horse's desire to follow them and how much the animals enjoy their companionship and attention during the sessions."

Hope Reins was made possible through a land-lease agreement with Bayleaf Baptist Church. Tschirret has since built a tack room, an arena and a welcome center, all with volunteer help. All farm work is done by volunteers and Tschirret hopes to hire full-time staff in the near future.

Tschirret, with the help of volunteers and future staff, wants to provide a different outlet for troubled youth in the Triangle.

"Sometimes parents or social workers have tried every type of therapy they can think of to help their children, but we provide ... a new way for troubled children to engage in healthy healing activities," Tschirret said. "We feel that Hope Reins is a place of comfort and healing and we want to share our faith with hurting children and their families."