

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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OPAF Launches McKeever's First Ride

July 7, 2009 – Langhorne, Pennsylvania - McKeever's First Ride™, OPAF's newest First Clinic was launched as part of the 2009 Amputee Coalition of America Conference in Atlanta on June 18th to rave reviews. Chastain Horse Park, a premier North American Handicapped Rider Association (NAHRA) barn was our host location for the inaugural event and what an event it was! The afternoon saw attendees from the ACA conference transported over from the Renaissance Waverly Hotel as well as representatives from local O & P shops, manufacturers and suppliers and practitioners from across the country to see what this latest First was all about.

The afternoon included many different aspects of equine (horse) therapy. Our Master of Ceremonies was Ed Dabney, internationally acclaimed horse trainer and clinician who introduced us to the liberating spirit of the horse and to the fact that being in the company of horses can help people of all ages heal in multiple ways. We learned there are many benefits of having contact with horses, whether from the ground or in the saddle. Attendees discovered for themselves that horses are good listeners who offer unconditional love, acceptance and forgiveness. Just being with a horse and touching them enhances our sense of well being and helps us forget the troubles of the day. Those who attended McKeever's First Ride seeking the opportunity to "enjoy horses and celebrate adaptive riding for fun, fellowship and fitness: discovered those benefits for themselves, and we look forward to them spreading the good news about equine-assisted activities wherever they go!

Ed Dabney generously presented demonstrations of Gentle Horsemanship training methods to the participants. Attendees were offered the chance to work with him one on one with horses in the main arena. Other participants enjoyed observing these mini-clinics, and were excited to discover that horses desire the leadership and fellowship of humans. Attendees of all ages enjoyed hands on experience with horses through activities involving groundwork and grooming in the barns. Youngsters enjoyed pony rides, and both young and old celebrated the spirit of the horse through arts and crafts activities and barn tours. They also had a chance to try out a horse Equisizer, which simulates the feeling of being on horseback. We were very fortunate to have two amputee riders, Tony Cerminaro, PT, and Tammie Higgenbotham demonstrate adaptive riding and share their stories of determination and inspiration. Enthusiastic volunteers and staff from Chastain Horse Park helped make the event successful.

But that's not all the afternoon held! We were thrilled to have as our musical guests of the afternoon, renowned Nashville recording artist, Templeton Thompson and husband Sam Gay. We were entertained by their wonderful singing talents and uplifted by their original songs of inspiration and encouragement. Templeton is a horsewoman who celebrates love, life and horses through her music. Additionally, she serves as the national spokesperson for EGALA (Equine Assisted Growth And Learning Association). Her powerful songs reinforced the message of the day that horses can enrich and transform our lives, if we'll let them! We're certain that this event will have lasting benefits for the ACA guests who attended McKeever's First Ride, as well as for those who couldn't attend, but heard a recap of the day during

Opening Ceremonies of the ACA conference, when Templeton and Ed Dabney both got to share the message of how horses can strengthen us and help us cope with life's troubles.

McKeever's First Ride is the vision of Deenie McKeever, daughter of O & P pioneer, Dan McKeever (CP #11) to honor his legacy and to extend his efforts to champion the needs of amputees. Dan McKeever always encouraged everyone to be the best they could be and this day definitely honored and promoted that ideal. Deenie was also instrumental in beginning the Horses for Heroes program at Chastain Horse Park which provides our armed services wounded warriors the chance for therapeutic contact with horses. Deenie's dream is to broadcast the good news that horses aid in the healing of body and soul, for young and old, for those who battle disease and chronic conditions, for veterans and civilians and for anyone desiring a deeper dimension of life. McKeever's First Ride is the culmination of those dreams. As Deenie so eloquently put it, "You don't have to be galloping across the plains to enjoy a horse!"

Our next McKeever's First Ride will be held in conjunction with the AOPA National Assembly meeting this fall. Working in sponsorship with Boots 'N Breeches Therapeutic Horsemanship, we will host another McKeever's First Ride on Wednesday afternoon, September 23 at Brookwood Equestrian Center in Tacoma, Washington. We are also looking to finalize details for another clinic this fall in Waterloo, Iowa.