



**HELEN O' IS SEVEN-O
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Special horses for special needs riders

Windrush Stables opens the doors to its new home

By ANN KORNUA

Windrush Stables recently moved to their own 37-acre farm at 9526 First Line, Campbellville on July 8th. There they will continue their riding programs for special needs riders. Leslie Ridout Gauer, owner of Windrush, is getting ready to start new therapy programs for people with special needs. This may mean children physically unable to straighten to a sitting position, young people with mental or emotional challenges, or adults debilitated by an accident or disease. The centre teaches people with physical and emotional disabilities to have the confidence to literally grab the reins, and ride.

"The children reach out to the animals and they just love them. They love that rhythmic gentle movement. This is something magical. Unlike some people the horses don't judge them." Leslie Ridout Gauer, program director and head instructor of Windrush said. "It does not matter if you cannot speak properly or your legs are crooked, the horses are patient and accepting."

Windrush Stable Therapeutic Riding Center has been teaching therapeutic riding since 1992. As a member of CanTRA (The Canadian Therapeutic Riding Association), all of their instructors are under CanTRA's stringent certification program. Often, most of their members are private individuals who sign up for the therapeutic classes, but Windrush opens its doors to organisations such as Erin Oak in Mississauga and for children in the Halton District School Board with behavioural problems. The healing starts when rider and horse learn to move and work together as a team. "The reason I got into this was almost by accident," Leslie explains. "There was a woman who was 42 years old and had been institutionalized all her life. She had never spoken a word due to developmental problems. Her support worker decided that riding would be good for her and brought her to

me for private lessons. It took three lessons to get her on the horse, but we stuck through it. Then, one day she just started talking. She would come home from her workshop and say, 'too windy, no riding.' It was just an amazing experience."

"75% of our children have developmental issues, but not all of our riders are children. About half are adult riders. We deal with cerebral palsy, brain injuries, spine bifida, and some MS patients. Even the blind or deaf can join the program." Leslie said.

Leslie books private students in from September to June, and through Erin Oaks and the Halton board runs fall, winter and spring sessions. Through the summer, Windrush has July and August day camps

for riders. None of the programs at Windrush would be possible if it was not for the team of volunteers who donate their time to help. "The volunteer program at Windrush is the backbone of the therapeutic program," Leslie explains. "Help is always needed in developing classroom programs and volunteers help with stable and grounds work. Volunteers plan fund-raising incentives and help with publicity."

All of the horses that work on the farm have gone through specific training to meet the demands of a special needs school horse. These horses work patiently with their riders to avoid any serious injuries to their horse or rider. "Our oldest horse, Nifty is now not ridden. He is 32 years old and just loves attention from the students. We use him primarily as a groom horse and teach the students how to clean and braid the mane of the horses since he's just too old to be ridden now," Leslie explains.

If you would like to learn more about the programs at Windrush or discover how you can get involved as a volunteer during the orientation sessions taking place this fall, you can contact Leslie at the farm at 905-854-6008.



NEW FURNITURE AND ELECTRONICS BY UNRESERVED PUBLIC

AUCTION

**Thursday, August 18, 2005
Mainway Community Centre
4015 Mainway, Burlington, On.
Preview 5 pm/ Auction 6 pm**

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