

Horse facility for special needs students relocates

By **ROBIN DOWNTON-POIRIER**

Special to The Champion

Windrush Stables has moved to its new home and will soon be operational for special needs students to learn how to ride their patient horses.

Formerly at Hendervale Equestrian Complex near Oakville, Windrush is now located at 9526 First Line in Nassagaweya.

Owner Lesley Ridout-Gauer said Windrush needed to have absolute control over the environment in order to protect the horses, riders, and volunteers — something that couldn't be done adequately at Hendervale. Thoughts of expansion also played a part in the decision.

"Especially with the nature of our business, we needed to have complete control over the environment including such things as lawn tractors and operational hours. We were also ready to grow so the time was right (for the move)," she said.

"We bought this property and moved in July 8. It does require some work but we should be able to offer classes by the last few weeks in August."

Windrush Stables currently offers horse riding instruction classes to about 40 special needs children and adults each week.

Ms Ridout-Gauer has been a riding instructor for 16 years and has been involved with the therapeutic riding program and a member of CanTRA (Canadian Therapeutic Riding Association) since 1992.

Both the horses and instructors at Windrush are stringently trained to accommodate special needs individuals and have helped hundreds of students since opening. Expansion plans include being able to offer the program to more individuals.

"We want to grow and expand and are hoping to be able to offer the program to up to 100 students each week," said Ms Ridout-Gauer. "As well, with the 37.5 acres, we are hoping to introduce small trail rides to allow the students to get used to outdoor riding. The increased room will also provide a wonderful area for the horses to run and relax after performing their stressful work."

Ms Ridout-Gauer emphasized that volunteers are a key component to Windrush Stables and their dedicated work is always appreciated. Volunteers are needed in several capacities including helping the instructors with classes by leading the horse and hold-

ing the students as many can't sit upright due to their individual physical limitations. Volunteers may also be used for various other tasks such as cleaning tack, painting fences or office work. With the planned expansion, more volunteers will be needed.

"We currently have a core group of about 12 volunteers that work two to three hours once a week. When we expand, we will need about 20 more volunteers to help the programs run smoothly," said Ms Ridout-Gauer.

An open house will be held Saturday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. to allow both former and new students as well as possible volunteers a chance to view the new facilities, hear about Windrush Stables' plans, and see if the therapeutic riding programs would be beneficial for them, said Ms Ridout-Gauer.

"We are very excited to be in our new location," she said. "We hope to maintain many of our old students as well as appeal to new ones that are in the surrounding communities."

For more information about programs or volunteering at Windrush Stables, contact Ms Ridout-Gauer at (905) 854-6008.

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