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Mackie Moore Takes the Reins



Mackie K. Moore, executive director of Rein & Shine, with a pair of donkeys guaranteed to make children and adults smile. PHOTOGRAPHS PROVIDED

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It's amazing how it happened — how a simple route change ultimately changed Mackie Moore's entire life. Having taken a break from her career in real estate to stay at home with her two young daughters, Mrs. Moore was enjoying life as a "Show Pony Mom," a role that reinvigorated her life-long passion for horses.

"Thank God my oldest daughter, Sophie, has the 'bug,'" laughs Mrs. Moore, her elbows propped casually on the picnic table that sits outside her office. "Both of my daughters ride, but Sophie wanted to show horses. That's how I got back into it.

"We switched show barns, so my daughter and I began driving by here every day," continues Mrs. Moore, who started riding horses when she was three years old. "I kept pointing at the place and saying to Sophie that my dream job would be to run that place."

Two years later, Mrs. Moore is living her dream as the new executive director of Rein & Shine, a North America Riding for the Handicapped Association-member facility committed to providing horseback riding as therapy to children and adults with physical, mental and emotional disabilities. Rein & Shine is located in Awendaw on a beautiful piece of forested, trail-carved acreage, the use of which has been donated to the organization by Tony and Helen (Cokie) Berenyi since the program's inception in 2001.

Since taking the reins of this local non-profit nearly four months ago, Mrs. Moore says she's never worked harder or been happier in her entire professional life. She admits, with a smile, on particularly hectic days she slips out of her office to seek a few moments of counsel with equine co-worker, Roger, who gently reminds her of the healing power of horses.

"Today there's just so much outside stimuli that we [humans] weren't designed for," states Mrs.

Moore, whose ability to call Roger and the organization's other horses to her side is reminiscent of the animal magnetism of The Beverly Hillbillies character Ellie May Clampett. "I think spending time with a horse, either on the ground or riding one, grounds us — it helps bring us back to who we really are."

Mrs. Moore's passion for the mystery and magic of horses is coupled with a personal desire to improve the lives of the Lowcountry's special needs children and adults. "My nephew was in a car accident when he was about 16," explains Mrs. Moore, a graduate of Georgetown University. "As a result, he was a paraplegic and confined to a wheelchair. I saw what that really meant for him and our family. That was the first step for me in wanting to help."

Since the 1950s, therapeutic riding has been used effectively to improve strength, posture, balance, coordination, motor planning, head and trunk control, speech, sensory integration and fine and visual motor skills in special needs riders. As a horse walks, the rider is moved forward and back, side-to-side, and the pelvis is rotated. These movements are similar to those the human pelvis experiences when a person is walking.

"For those confined to a wheelchair, they suddenly know what it's like to walk," says Mrs. Moore. "It's an incredible thing to watch."

So incredible that she admits tears of joy flow freely at Rein & Shine. During her first days working there, she recalls a young boy from Moultrie Middle School who touched the hearts of her and her staff. "He was in a wheelchair," she says. "He was very quiet and somber, sitting kind of hunched over. After we got him on a horse, he sat up straight and smiled so big. He wasn't able to talk, but the noises he made were of sheer glee. Seeing that kind of response to being on a horse brings out so much emotion because it's so beautiful — it's like freeing someone."

Like many charitable organizations across the Lowcountry, Rein & Shine has felt the financial impact of the recent economic downturn. But despite the financial challenges, she says the program is positioned to move beyond its Mom-and-Pop roots to reach more people in the community. "We never want to lose our Mom-and-Pop feel, but now, more than ever, our special needs citizens need what only a program like this has to offer," states Mrs. Moore. "We don't turn people away, regardless of their ability to pay."

Mrs. Moore points to Rein & Shine's commitment to offer therapeutic riding and other hippa therapies to students at Pattison's Academy, the area's first charter school specifically designed for children with multiple disabilities, when the school opens this fall.

Getting a special needs person onto a horse is a labor-intensive process, one that requires a lead, two side-walkers and a certified equine therapy instructor who teaches horsemanship skills to students during their therapy sessions. "We could not do what we do without our volunteers," she insists. "They are absolutely essential. We have a dedicated volunteer board of directors. We have volunteers who work as leads and side-walkers during therapy, volunteers who come out to feed the animals twice a day, and volunteers who muck out the stalls and clean and drag the fields. It's amazing what people do to help us. It's a group effort — everyone does whatever it takes.

"We definitely depend on the generosity of others to operate," adds Mrs. Moore. "From our farm equipment to our riding equipment to even our wonderful therapy horses, most everything here has been donated."

Despite her focus on all there is for which to be grateful, at the end of the day, Mrs. Moore admits she has a number of hungry mouths to feed.

"We get a large part of our operating budget through fundraisers," says Mrs. Moore. "We're holding a horseshow and Spring Wing-Ding on May 1. It's a great opportunity for the public to be out here, to get the feel for the place and to find out more about what we do. It will be a lot of fun, too."

Rein & Shines also offers a horsemanship program for children and adults without special needs. The funds generated by the program helps support the primary mission of the organization.

"I feel so fortunate to have a job I absolutely love," concludes Mrs. Moore. "It's a job that helps other people, and I get to see the results of what we do every day.

"I wear jeans and a T-shirt to work and my office is in a barn, but I've never been happier with anything I've done professionally. This job was made for me, and I was made for it."

To find out more about Rein & Shine and how you can help, please call (843) 849-0964 or visit online at www.reinandshine.org.