



# THE LEAD ROPE

July 2021

Walk On Therapeutic Riding Programs, Inc.

Est. 2001

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS

### Walk On Golf Scramble

July 31, 2021

Pheasant Hills Golf Course  
Hammond, WI -Noon Start

To register a team, sign up or to sponsor a hole, contact Rick Allen at 715-558-9755, or email at [rick.allen.wi@outlook.com](mailto:rick.allen.wi@outlook.com).

### 20th Anniversary Fall Gala

September 25, 2021

Pheasant Hills Golf Course  
Hammond, WI

Come to help us celebrate two decades of providing individualized horseback riding activities and therapeutic riding instruction to children and adults with physical, developmental, social and emotional disabilities.

To learn more about our classes, contact us at 715-425-2025 or go to [www.walkontherapeutichorsemanship.org](http://www.walkontherapeutichorsemanship.org).

**Thank you to everyone who so generously donated during Give Big St Croix - we raised \$2,600 for WO participants!**

## Walk On Riders are Back in the Saddle!

Falling snowflakes and cool temperatures were no match for the anticipation in the air as riders and their families entered the familiar barn for Walk On Therapeutic Riding Program's first session of its 20th anniversary year in River Falls on April 20, 2021. It was the first session the PATH (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship) certified center has run since 2019. Due to the pandemic, Walk On could only offer very limited lessons last season.

This evening there were "Hi Ken's" (Ken Giske is Walk On's program director) and masked hugs of reunion. Riders were assigned their mount and started the grooming and saddling process with trained volunteers at their sides. Then, the missed-yet-familiar clamor of "Horse coming through!" rang through the barn as each group left its stall to enter the riding arena.

In 1988, Ken and his wife Katy moved to their home and acreage in River Falls (and current program location). The Giskes started to populate their 20 acres with horses, dogs, and cats. Ken, who has a degree in adaptive physical education and athletic training, was employed at Courage Kenny Rehabilitation Institute as the director of aquatics and Katy was a therapeutic recreational specialist in chemical dependency and mental health counselor at the time. With two preschool-aged daughters, she decided to open a home day care. This allowed the couple to turn their "What if we tried to create an adaptive riding program?" dream into reality. Walk On Therapeutic Riding Programs was established in 2001.

Ken became a certified PATH instructor, horses were trained, and volunteers and funding sought. Katy became vice president and took charge of the multi-channel communication between riders and families, as well as volunteer recruitment, training and coordination. "Our first pilot class of 5 riders and 15 volunteers was held on Monday, September 10, 2001. It was one filled with laughter, fun and everyone having a positive interaction with equine," stated Ken. (Continued on page 2)





## **Walk On Therapeutic Riding Programs, Inc.**

1469 County Road J -- River Falls, WI 54022

[www.walkontherapeutichorsemanship.org](http://www.walkontherapeutichorsemanship.org)

Email: [walkontherapeuticriding@gmail.com](mailto:walkontherapeuticriding@gmail.com) / Phone: 715.425.2025

### **Walk On Offers Summer Program to Enhance Speech/Language Skills**

Unbridled Abilities, LLC is offering a new hippotherapy program using horses to further the speech and language goals of children. Sessions can be tailored in different ways to help meet specific physical, occupational, and speech therapy goals. Contact certified speech therapist and owner of Unbridled Abilities Madeline Boe for more information, or visit the website:

[www.unbridledabilities.com](http://www.unbridledabilities.com) / Phone: 262.339.1529 / [madeline@unbridledabilities.com](mailto:madeline@unbridledabilities.com)

(Continued ...) "But the next day's events of September 11 cast a shadow of fear and uncertainty on everyone's lives." Ken and Katy considered canceling the next class but decided to move forward. After a subdued start, they started to see smiles and the engagement of riders following Ken's instructions to stop, turn and "Walk On!"

Over the next 20 years, Walk On has continued to thrive and has expanded to run 6 sessions from April to Thanksgiving. With 28 riders per session, each rider requires 1-3 volunteer assists depending level of experience and physical, emotional, or cognitive challenges. Riders participate from all over Pierce and St. Croix counties to receive the numerous benefits therapeutic horsemanship provides: improved motor skills, core strength, muscle tone, posture, and perhaps most important - confidence. Many riders struggle with expressing themselves vocally, so it is imperative that they direct the horses with "walk on, whoa, and horse coming through."

In the fall of 2007, Katy was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Throughout her treatment, she continued her essential roles of coordinating participants, volunteers and providing day care to many children until she succumbed to the disease in April of 2011.

"I took a year off from running the program to evaluate whether to continue or not." Ken knew deep down it was something he

could not walk away from - he'd spent a career and life of serving those with disabilities. Walk On reopened in April of 2012.

The program receives a portion of its operating dollars from Pierce and St. Croix counties and registration fees, but fundraising has been an integral part to sustain the operation and the year-

round dedication it requires. "For instance, there are horses to feed and care for, maintenance of the barn, pastures, tack and supplies to purchase."

Walk On relies on the support of generous donors for nearly half of its operating budget through events and campaigns throughout the year. COVID affected the ability to run its major fundraiser, The Annual

Gala, in 2020. With restrictions lifted and positive cases low, there will be a Golf Scramble on July 31st and The Fall Gala on September 25; both will be held at Pheasant Hills Golf Course in Hammond, WI Other fundraising activities include Give Big St. Croix (April 27) and the sale of handmade greeting cards. The website has current information about all activities: [www.walkontherapeutichorsemanship.org](http://www.walkontherapeutichorsemanship.org).

"It's unbelievable that we've been supported and have improved the lives of so many for two decades." It is the riders whose experiences keep Ken motivated, such as the accomplished equestrian who had a severe brain injury from a car accident.

"When she mounted her horse, she kept shouting, 'I am riding and I feel free!'"

