

# Handicapped riders trade wheelchairs for horses

**BY SHEILA MILLER**  
**HARRISBURG** — Other Pennsylvanians will soon be joining with Lancaster County in providing a new program for the handicapped. At a meeting held at the Sheraton near Harrisburg on Thursday, representatives from the Easter Seals Society and 4-H joined together for Horseback Riding for the Handicapped and Pony Express.

Even though there has been a program of this type in Lancaster County since 1971, it will be something new for many counties throughout the state.

Jack Sippel, executive director for the Lancaster County Easter Seals Society explained that the county's program was started nine years ago from a legacy donated to the society by a Mennonite family, earmarked for a horsemanship program. Working strictly with volunteers and members of the Lancaster Pony Club, the program had its ups and downs and finally split up after about four years.

Then two years ago, Carol Henkel, who is the current head instructor for the Lancaster County Handicapped Riding Program, and Mary Ann Ferro, assistant instructor, got together and shared their common interest in helping people with physical limitations enjoy the pleasures and therapy of riding horses.

The two young women approached Jack Sippel about the possibilities of reorganizing the program, and were taken on as the Easter Seals staff instructors.

Today the current program is serving as a model to others of its type throughout the state, and is a practical source of information for the development of the statewide program.

The riding therapy takes place at Hidden Acres Farm, Quarryville. One of the program's students, now an instructor, received a standing ovation at a recent horse show at Devon for her accomplishments in riding

and her courage to overcome a handicap.

According to Carol Henkel, the social aspect of the program is just as important to the participants with handicaps as is the therapeutic benefit. She said the students become more extrovert when they can associate with their peers in a normal atmosphere where they are just one of the gang.

Henkel said that some of the handicapped riders find a new ability on top of a horse, and both riders and helpers gain a better rapport.

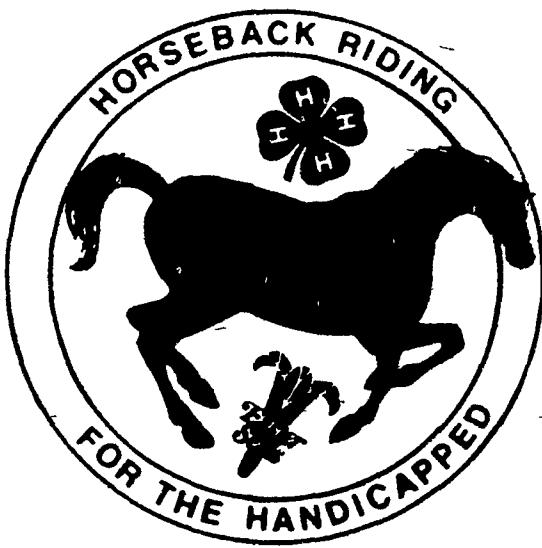
Carol's assistant, Mary Ann Ferro, agreed with the social benefits, and stressed that horseback riding for the handicapped had an automatic payoff. She said the horse's movement is excellent physical therapy, and it gives the students an opportunity to realize a specific goal.

The statewide program is just getting its hooves off the ground, but hopes to have a summer program by 1981, with a full-time state coordinator by January 1 of next year.

This Thursday's meeting was to get county Easter

Seals and 4-H people together to discuss the program goals and details. If all goes according to plans, a major fund-raising effort will take place in September, 1980, called the Pony Express.

4-H'ers throughout the state will be able to participate in a ride to raise money so that the handicapped people will be able to ride. According to Frank Bortz, curriculum specialist professional development 4-H, youth at Penn State said this will involve the 100,000 4-H club members in all of the



The horseback riding for handicapped will take a lot of team work, organization and dollars. Safety equipment, insurance, special mounting equipment, horses and their feed and care, student transportation, and medical costs all add up to a considerable sum.

But, it's a program that can survive on a shoestring,

noted Carol Henkel, citing the experiences and budgets of the Lancaster program.

And, noted the meeting participants, it is worth every penny of the effort just to see the freedom and sheer joy beaming from the riders faces as they hurdle their handicaps and trade wheelchairs for horses.

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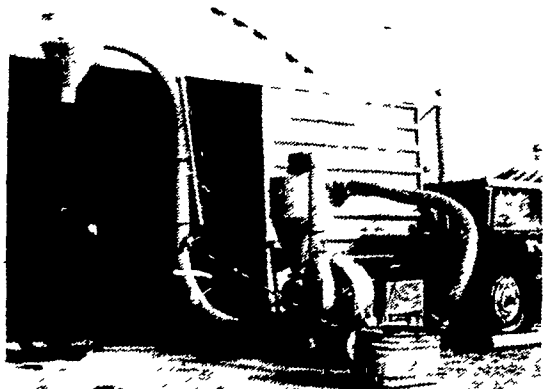
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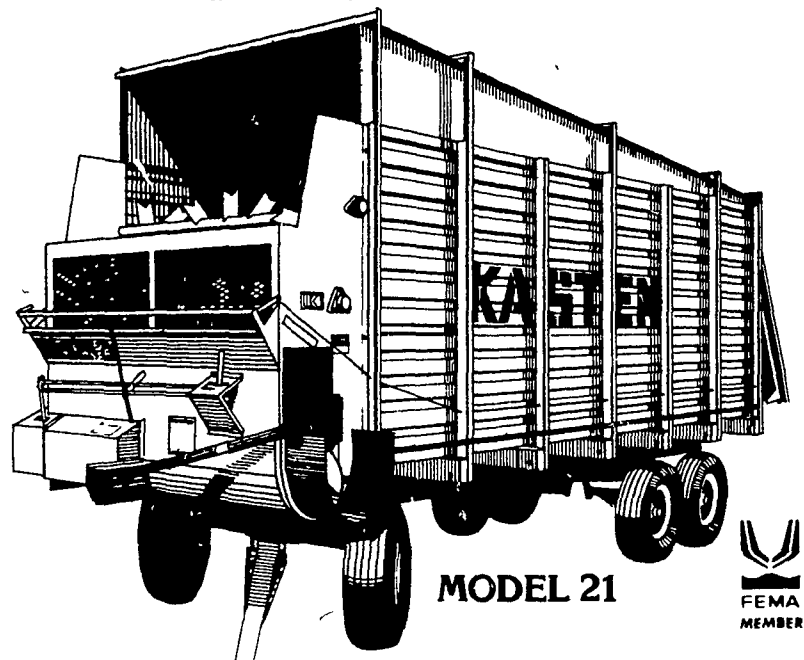
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