

# Franklin County Program

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their legs are relaxed." Many of the children with cerebral palsy ride with only a bareback pad between them and the horse to maximize their contact with the horse's warmth and movement.

While Ellie cannot speak, she understands what is said to her and thoroughly enjoys her riding lessons, if her smile is any indication. She often helps to brush the horse before a lesson. "We try to teach the children some stable

management also," said instructor Sandy Robinson, "instead of just having them come in and ride."

Sandy demonstrated to student Steve Ebersole, 13, how to clean out the hooves of the horse he was about to ride.

"Dusty has shoes on his front feet," she explained, "and that makes them deeper. They hold more dirt. This doesn't hurt him," she continued, as she used a foot pick on Dusty, "but you do have to watch out for the sensitive spot, called the frog."

After the foot-cleaning session, Steve curried Dusty and sprayed him with fly repellent.

Steve, who has spina bifida, has been riding for four years, the last two under Sandy's instruction. The horse he was accustomed to riding is ill and will be leaving the program, so he is now learning to ride and care for Dusty, an Appaloosa.

Steve's confidence has improved since he started riding, says Sandy. At first, he didn't trot the horse or ride alone. "He gets on and rides by himself now," she said. He's obviously athletic; he just has to believe he can use it. He also talks more now — he's not as shy."

"Steve had side walkers when he first started riding," his mother, Wilma, added. "He only started trotting last year. His legs tend to draw together — the warmth of the horse relaxes them."

After the lesson, a smiling Steve couldn't think of anything he disliked about the program. To him, trotting is the best part.

To this observer, the best thing about Horsemanship for the Handicapped is the empty wheelchairs and the idle crutches.

And the smiles.

All children applying to the program are screened by a physical therapist, and must have their doc-

tor's permission to participate. The program requires riders to wear special belts and helmets for safety.

Anyone interested in more information about the program may contact Bob Kessler at the Franklin County Extension Office at 263-9226.



Steve does "Around the World"—turning himself completely around in the saddle without assistance—to develop coordination and balance.



Matthew does sit-ups on Jeannie's back to strengthen his upper body muscles.

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