

# Helping Horses to Provide Therapy



Growing up, Joan Pellegrino's favorite place to sit was in a horse's saddle. So, three years ago when the wound care nurse was searching the Internet for a volunteer opportunity with a local organization that offers therapeutic riding for the disabled, she knew she had hit pay dirt when the Long Island Riding for the Handicapped Association popped up on her Google™ search.

"They are the only organization that offers a free therapeutic riding program for disabled kids," said the Franklin Square resident. "I have a special place in my heart for disabled kids ... I love being around horses, so for me it's a double win."

Each week she drives to a horse ranch in Syosset and grooms and "tacks" the horses or puts the saddles and bridles on them for the riders. She also functions as a lead or side walker, which is a volunteer who leads the horse or walks alongside the horse to ensure the safety of the rider.



*Joan Pellegrino, R.N., wound care nurse, right, leads a therapy horse during a session in Syosset for the Long Island Riding for the Handicapped Association.*

Twice a week volunteer physical therapists lead a group of several riders who teach them proper posture, body alignment and range of motion exercises while they sit atop their horses.

Ms. Pellegrino says the aim of the program is to provide therapeutic exercise

that will not only brighten the mood of the riders but also strengthen their upper and lower extremities and improve their balance and eye-hand coordination.

Although she donates her time and skill to helping disabled children and adults, Ms. Pellegrino says she receives more from her volunteerism than she gives.

"These kids are born with these problems yet they do not focus on their disabilities; they are happy being who they are," she said. "We could all learn a lesson from them."

If you would like to volunteer for the Long Island Riding for the Handicapped Association, Inc., call Madeline Buglione, president of the organization, at (516) 783-3059.

## A South Nassau Connection

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"It was a strange, weird feeling ... I'm standing there thinking I'm here now as an adult and it seemed like only yesterday I was a kid attending the clinic," said Mr. Nastro whose sister, Keri, worked in South Nassau Hospital's coffee shop for two years while she attended high school.

After graduating from the radiography school last year, accepting a position as a full-time X-ray technologist at South Nassau was a logical next step.

"This is a great place to work and South Nassau does so much for the community," he said. "I have made so many friends here. I have a sense of belonging ... it really is like a family."

"South Nassau even figures into the technologist's future. "I'd like to get my master's degree in business administration and become an administrator of radiology ... and retire from South Nassau one day," he said. "Really."



*At his 2008 graduation from the Robert J. Hochstim School of Radiography, Christopher Nastro is standing fifth from right.*