



CHALLENGE NEW MEXICO: NORTH MESA RIDERS FACT SHEET

WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE NEW MEXICO NORTH MESA RIDERS PROGRAM?

The North Mesa Riders in Los Alamos is a Challenge New Mexico therapeutic riding program. We operate in compliance with the standards of the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA). We are an all-volunteer program guided by a volunteer Program Director who has been certified as a therapeutic riding instructor with NARHA.

WHAT IS THERAPEUTIC RIDING?

Therapeutic riding programs use horse-oriented activities to contribute positively to those who face cognitive, physical, emotional, and social challenges. The natural motion of the horse helps riders achieve balance, better spinal position, and strengthen leg and other body muscles. Just as importantly, those who never thought they would ever have the opportunity to ride an animal as powerful and majestic as a horse achieve levels of self-esteem and independence that can't be gained from other therapy programs.

WHAT IS THE NORTH AMERICAN RIDING FOR THE HANDICAPPED ASSOCIATION (NARHA)?

Therapeutic riding provides benefits in the areas of therapy, education, sport, and recreation and leisure. The Challenge New Mexico North Mesa Riders Program operates in compliance with the mandatory and applicable standards set forth by the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA). The association, formed in 1969 and headquartered in Denver, is a nonprofit organization that exists to promote equine activities for individuals with disabilities. NARHA promotes therapeutic riding primarily through public awareness campaigns and educational events. To find out more about NARHA, check out <http://www.narha.org>. Challenge New Mexico is a non-profit organization dedicated to serving physically and mentally challenged residents of northern New Mexico.

WHO CAN RIDE IN THE CHALLENGE NEW MEXICO NORTH MESA RIDERS PROGRAM?

Any member of the Los Alamos and northern New Mexico community who:

- Is five years of age or older. There are no maximum age ranges for riders except those imposed by a physician.
- Is unable to participate in a regular riding program because of physical, mental, emotional, or social disabilities.
- Does not have disabilities that fall within the NARHA guidelines for precautions and contraindications.

Note that our program will be limited during 2005, and we plan to expand it during 2006.

CNM North Mesa Riders provides equine-oriented activities, in conformance with guidelines established by the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association, to make a positive contribution to Los Alamos County and northern New Mexico community members who face physical, emotional, social and mental challenges. Our program also strives to provide our students, volunteers, and community with a better understanding and appreciation of how horses—and all animals—contribute to the well being of people.



WHO PROVIDES THERAPEUTIC RIDING INSTRUCTION?

A team of volunteers provides therapeutic riding. The Therapist (physical, occupational, or speech), as available, helps the Riding Instructor assess the rider's capabilities and limitations and determine what special equipment or help will be needed. The Riding Instructor meets the certification standards of the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association. Volunteers assist the Riding Instructor in each lesson by leading the horse, when indicated; walking beside the horse to help the rider maintain balance; and coaching and encouraging the riders as they work through each lesson. All volunteers are required to complete a training workshop before they can work with riders.

WHAT SAFETY ELEMENTS DOES THE THERAPEUTIC RIDING PROGRAM INCLUDE?

The Challenge New Mexico North Mesa Riders program operates under the guidelines of the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association and abides by the following safety criteria:

- The Program Instructors must meet the certification standards for NARHA instructors and must be certified in CPR/First Aid.
- All riders must wear safety helmets and use safety stirrups.
- If possible, each rider is assessed by the therapist, in conjunction with the Program Instructor, to determine additional safety equipment and volunteer requirements that may be needed.
- All riders are required to provide a physician's release, which includes a medical history and contraindications.
- All volunteers must attend a training workshop.

WHAT RELEASE FORMS MUST RIDERS COMPLETE?

All parents or wards of young riders and all adult riders must complete the following paperwork in order to ride with the Challenge New Mexico North Mesa Riders (volunteers must complete the last two forms):

- Medical History/Physician Release form
- Insurance Waiver and Liability Release form

Medical information is strictly confidential.

The Insurance Waiver and Liability Release Form is very important because it acknowledges the parent, guardian or rider's understanding that riding activities involve inherent risk. The Challenge New Mexico North Mesa Riders program carries liability insurance. ***However, all participants (or their parents or guardians) must understand and acknowledge their responsibilities in choosing to participate in riding with its potential for risk as well as possible benefits.***

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WHAT IS THE COST OF A THERAPEUTIC RIDING LESSON?

The cost of each lesson is \$10. Lessons last from 30-60 minutes, depending on the energy level of the riders.

ARE LESSONS PRIVATE OR GROUP?

Most therapeutic riding lessons are provided in groups of two or more riders. Group lessons offer more opportunities for social interaction and games. Individual lessons may be scheduled if the Therapist and Riding Instructor determine that a rider would gain more benefit.

Children and adults generally ride in different classes.

ARE ENGLISH OR WESTERN SADDLES USED?

The focus of the Challenge New Mexico North Mesa Riders Program is on the Balanced Seat, which can be achieved riding English or Western. This riding style promotes maximum balance, use of muscles, and interaction with the horse.

WHAT IS THE SCHEDULE OF CLASSES?

Classes begin in May and run weekly through September (schedule is subject to change). Typically, riders take one lesson a week. Schedules for 2005 TBD.

SHOULD RIDERS WEAR SPECIAL CLOTHING?

Practical and economic considerations may make it difficult for riders and their families to invest in formal riding attire. However, if possible, riding breeches or jeans are preferred. Remember, “looking the part” may also improve the rider’s self-assurance and self-esteem.

In general, jeans and other trousers should be loose enough to allow the rider to sit comfortably. There should not be a tight crease or pressure across the hips, upper thigh and abdomen. Pant legs should be long enough to cover the shins when the knee is bent. Sweatpants often work very well. Riders who are subject to skin breakdown or pressure sores need to be careful of leg seams.

Shorts should not be worn for riding!

Shirts should be comfortable and loose fitting, allowing the rider to participate in warming-up exercises that require large arm movements. Riders should bring an extra jacket or sweater in case of a weather change. Jackets and shirts should not be too long. The rider should not be able to sit on the back of a shirt or jacket. Loose, flapping jackets can distract both horse and rider.

Sneakers and hiking boots are not allowed! English or Western boots or paddock boots are preferred. If riding boots are

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not physically or economically feasible, hard leather shoes with a low heel (such as lace-up walking shoes) are preferred.

MAY PARENTS OR FRIENDS WATCH THE LESSONS?

Absolutely! Parents (and friends) are encouraged to watch each lesson. However, spectators are not permitted in the arena, and we ask that you allow the rider to concentrate on the directions of the Riding Instructor and volunteers.

Some parents and friends also want to serve as volunteers in the riding program. All volunteer efforts are welcome! Remember that all volunteers are required to attend a training workshop and complete certain forms. Also, we prefer to partner riders with volunteers who are not a parent, guardian, or friend.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING A TYPICAL RIDING LESSON?

The lesson begins as soon as the rider arrives at the paddock. Riders are encouraged to brush their horses and prepare them as much as possible for the lesson. Volunteers assist and supervise the activities.

For more information, contact:

Sue Bargeloh,
Program Director:
661-9656 or 606-0787

Once mounted and in the arena, riders are asked to perform a series of stretching and relaxation exercises. This short warm-up period helps to prepare them for the more rigorous lesson.

Carol Furchner,
Program Administrator
672-1056 or 412-3379
csf@furpaw.com

About half of each lesson focuses on helping the rider to learn how to ride effectively. Depending on their capabilities, riders are encouraged to achieve as much independence in riding as possible. They learn how to sit the horse at the walk and trot, guide the horse around the arena, and attain control of the animal. Riders learn to communicate with their horses so that they become a team. They are encouraged to talk to the horse, to learn about horses and the anatomy of the horse, and to learn about the equipment they use when riding.

Lisa Reader,
Certified Instructor
662-1966

Web site:

<http://northmesariders.org>

Therapeutic riding horses are provided through the generosity of North Mesa Stable horse owners.

For the rest of the lesson, riders and horses are encouraged to relax by playing games, performing cooling off exercises, or sometimes going for a “trail” ride. All riding activities, even those that are on the trail, involve the riding instructor and appropriate volunteers to ensure each rider’s safety. At the end of each lesson, riders are assisted in either cleaning their horse or preparing their horse for the next lesson.

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