

# TEC

THE THERAPEUTIC EQUESTRIAN CENTER

# Connections

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Katie leaves her wheelchair behind for a ride on Garth.



Lakeshore Roosevelt Elementary School students learn about TEC for their 'Corn for a Cause' annual fundraiser.

## Horse Spotlight- Tori, TEC's Small but Mighty Change Agent!

Tori and TEC crossed paths in 2008 when she was part of a herd dispersal sale in Vandalia, Ohio. As a trail riding horse, she gave rides to people with little or no horse experience. TEC instructors Mara Vergon and Danielle Countryman went to see if any of the horses had what it takes to be a therapeutic riding horse. Two horses stood out as excellent candidates, Tori and Garth. Seven years later, Tori has proven time and time again that she's "got what it takes". The Arabian/Welsh pony cross has served as the "go to" mount for our smallest riders.

Tori has improved body strength, increased attention spans, and built confidence while making the work fun for her riders. Reyna Price, Elysa's mother said, "I call her 'True Tori' because with Elysa I've seen her patience and insight to see Elysa for who she is."



Tori is always ready for TEC Riders. Pictured with Grandpa Chuck (L) and Elysa (R).

*Both Elysa and Tori are "truly" beautiful, rambunctious, and prissy."*

Hayden rides Tori on Saturday mornings. She patiently stands while Hayden, in his wheelchair works hard to brush her. Hayden loves to get out of his wheelchair and get moving on Tori. You'll hear him giggle from sheer joy as she trots around the arena.

Beth Drollinger observes "Tori is all business during lesson time but her true personality really shows through when she is off duty. I love that girl." Tori is the first one to use her foot to kick the stall door when it's time to go outside as if to say "Hurry it up, I want to go out and eat my grass!"

Tori's unique personality and special gifts shine through as TEC's smallest but very mighty "change agent". Visit [www.tecfarm.org](http://www.tecfarm.org) to meet the rest of our horses and learn how to become a rider or volunteer.

## Kathy Barton - A Volunteer Since Day One

If you received this newsletter in the mail, it's because of TEC volunteer Kathy Barton. Kathy is a Blossomland Learning Center teacher and coordinates assembly of these newsletters by Blossomland students. This project teaches students valuable skills such as staying on task, working as a team, and learning an assembly process. Kathy has been involved with TEC since we were just an idea and has helped us build and grow ever since. As you read Kathy's answers to the questions below picture yourself as a TEC volunteer! To become involved, contact TEC at 269-429-0671 or [info@tecfarm.org](mailto:info@tecfarm.org). Thanks Kathy for all you give to our riders and the Saddle STARS students!

**What is your favorite part of being a TEC volunteer?** *"My favorite part of being a volunteer is working with the riders and watching them grow in their skills. I enjoy shopping for new activities, putting together books for "Saddle STARS", and dreaming up activities such as the "Rodeo" and "Cattle Drive" that involves the students in learning about relationships between riders and horses. I love being involved in the background and putting activities together for the riders and others to enjoy."*

**In all the time you have worked with TEC what moment really made you realize why TEC is so important?** *"The smiles on the riders' faces, the tears in the parents eyes when they see their riders building relationships with the horses and volunteers. The volunteers that smile and shed tears every time a rider improves on a skill or learns something for the first time. And especially the unconditional love that is shared by everyone involved. This is why TEC is so important to everyone involved in this very special program."*



Kathy Barton (pictured second from left) has been a vital part of TEC for nine years and was part of forming the Therapeutic Equestrian Center in 2005.

**What would you tell anyone who was thinking of volunteering with us?**

*"Volunteers, please come and share your talents with us, bring your hearts to build relationships with the riders, horses, parents, and other volunteers, and learn how wonderful each and every day can be learning new skills and sharing smiles with others at TEC."*

**The total hours given by volunteers in 2014 was 6,892; in 2013 it was 3,842, a 79% increase.** Our TEC volunteers provided 873 Therapeutic Riding Hours, 985 Saddle STARS Hours and 768 Community-Based Instruction Hours for a total of 2,626 Total Hours of Instruction for 2014. This increase allowed a 27% increase the number of people we served.

**THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS! GREAT WORK!**

### DONORS SPRING INTO ACTION!

**Our Christmas Appeal Donors** - Thanks to you we were able to raise \$3,385 from our year-end appeal!

**St. Denys Foundation** - Thank you for a \$1,000 grant to help with operating expenses.

**Silver Beach Pizza** - Thanks for another great giveback night to help us raise \$529!

**Lakeshore Roosevelt Elementary School Students, Parents, and Staff** - Thanks for making TEC your fundraising focus of the PTO 'Corn for a Cause' popcorn fundraiser for the rest of this school year. Thank you also to Lakeshore Schools and Dana Riley for making this happen.

**The Getaway & 97.5 Y Country's Wild Bill** - Thank you for helping us raise \$700 for your St. Patty Saturday giveback night for TEC.

**Lakeland Health** - Thank you letting us be a part of your 2015 community "I Love Learning" expo!

#### To Donate to TEC:

Mail checks to: TEC, P.O. Box 1250, Niles, MI 49120  
or visit [www.tecfarm.org/donate](http://www.tecfarm.org/donate) for our PayPal link.

### Welcome New Board Member Beth Drollinger!



We are so excited to welcome a familiar face to the TEC Board of Directors, Beth Drollinger! Beth has been with TEC for four years, serving three of those as our Volunteer Coordinator.

"I totally stepped out of my box when I started volunteering since I had never worked with horses before. I have learned so much in the past four years. I believe in TEC's mission and all the opportunities that it provides our riders. I am committed to TEC and its future. I am truly honored to be part of the Board now," says Beth.

Welcome Beth! We're thrilled to have you!



***CBI Students from (left to right) Laura, Brandon, Blossomland Paraprofessional Greg Street, Mario and Rose having fun working on building job skills at TEC.***

## **TEC Community-Based Instruction Students Tackle the Work World!**

For teenagers, the path from high school to adulthood can be exciting and overwhelming. For students with disabilities, however, that road is not always easily navigated.

Fortunately **the vibrant, hardworking young adults from Blossomland Learning Center gain valuable opportunities in animal-related careers** thanks to TEC's participation in Berrien RESA's Community-Based Instruction program (CBI).

The CBI students have moderate to severe intellectual disabilities and may also have autism, and physical and emotional disabilities. **They come to TEC to learn work skills that will transition into adult life.**

Blossomland teacher, Linda Barker, says that students learn important life skills as they prepare to come to work at TEC. *"We try not to tell them what to do, we try to let them figure it out. When they come to TEC they need to know to pack a nutritious lunch, what type of clothes to wear, and what time they need to be ready. **They may have never thought they could have a job with animals at a veterinary clinic, dog groomers, or one of the many local farms.**"*

At TEC students do a variety of tasks such as cleaning the horse stalls, scrubbing water buckets, and raking leaves. Although it's hard work, the students enjoy the experience of caring for the horses and the facility. **They learn to make eye contact, work for someone else, and to take pride in their job.** *"I like to take care of the horses. They love me,"* says CBI participant Josie. Josie and her fellow CBI students also enjoy the opportunity to be mentors for the Saddle STARS students when they come for their Day at the Farm.

Blossomland Paraprofessional Greg Street says having CBI students working at TEC gives them a chance to work in a unique setting and provides real life experience. *"It teaches independence and also teaches them to be discerning, to see what needs to be done, and when to do it. **Working at TEC for them is more hands on and not just looking over someone's shoulder. They learn initiative and how to take charge, to not be fearful of the work,**"* Street explains.

The program also teaches students the feeling of independence, self-satisfaction, and accomplishment. TEC riding instructor Autumn Zick said, *"**During a riding lesson Mario who is also a CBI student, saw a stall needed to be cleaned. Without being told, he got the pitch fork and got the job done. Mario was grinning from ear to ear; you could just see how proud he was to know what to do and how to help out.**"*

*"In our students' lives, many times, someone is doing something for them. At TEC they do for others, in this case, it's an animal that can accept the care unconditionally. Students can give to the horses and have an opportunity to help someone else. It teaches them how important that is and lets them experience that great feeling you get when you give, which is not always afforded them,"* explains Linda.

Last year TEC provided 768 hours of Community-Based Instruction/Job Training to area Blossomland students. To learn how you can be a part of TEC's CBI program, e-mail us at [info@tecfarm.org](mailto:info@tecfarm.org).

# “I DID IT!”

Through the TEC program, Allie, age 7, gained muscle control she is lacking due to Ataxia. She has been a TEC rider for three years.



“When I saw my daughter ride by herself for the first time I realized, at that moment, that she may not ever be physically able to climb a mountain, but she was definitely going to be able to move them. I thought to myself, ‘nothing is going to be able to stop this girl!’”

*Stanley, mother of TEC rider Allie*

At the Therapeutic Equestrian Center (TEC) our mission is to enhance the lives of people with special needs through horse-related activities. TEC has provided “I DID IT!” moments to our special needs community since 2006.

To read more “I DID IT!” stories, visit us at [www.tecfarm.org](http://www.tecfarm.org)

**TOGETHER...  
PEOPLE & HORSES CHALLENGE,  
STRENGTHEN, AND INSPIRE!**

Located at Stockbridge Equestrian Center  
615 N. M-140, Watervliet, MI 49098 (269) 429-0671



## Upcoming Events

**04/06/15 Spring Riding Session Begins -**  
Lessons at the TEC barn located at Stockbridge Equestrian Center.

**05/26/15 & 05/27/15 - Volunteer Training Part I & II**  
At the TEC Barn at Stockbridge Equestrian Center.

**06/08/15 Summer Riding Session I Begins -**  
Lessons at the TEC barn located at Stockbridge Equestrian Center.

**07/27/15 Summer Riding Session II Begins -**  
Lessons at the TEC barn located at Stockbridge Equestrian Center.

**09/01/15 & 09/02/15 Volunteer Training Part I & II -**  
At the TEC Barn at Stockbridge Equestrian Center.

**9/13/15 (SAVE THE DATE) – 6th Annual TEC Fest** at Riverview Park. (Visit [www.tecfarm.org/tecfest](http://www.tecfarm.org/tecfest) for more details.)

### Therapeutic Equestrian Center

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