



FIELDSTONE FARM

*A Horse Can Change A Life*

# Bits & Paces

Winter 2026



## Everett reaches goals on horseback

"It's a horse!" exclaims five-year-old Everett as he completes a wooden animal puzzle. He does so while sitting astride a real horse named Jackson that stands perfectly still with the puzzle resting on his neck.

Everett's instructor gives him a high five. The boy beams and confidently calls out, "Walk on," directing Jackson to the next quest: a basketball hoop on the far side of the ring. As they move forward, Everett gently grasps the reins between his fingers and tightens his legs around Jackson.

Our instructors weave games and puzzles into lessons to motivate our young students to improve their fine-motor skills, coordination and balance, all while building strength and confidence as they maneuver a 1,500-pound horse around the arena. Add to that, a fun and nurturing environment with our gentle, four-legged friends and you have the unique experience of therapeutic riding at Fieldstone Farm.

Everett's mom, Rebecca, brought her son to Fieldstone in search of something different from traditional occupational and physical therapy to help Everett gain strength and independence.

"OT and PT often felt more like homework," she said. And group sports like soccer and t-ball didn't provide the inclusive, individualized attention he needed. Everett

has always loved horses, so when Rebecca heard about Fieldstone, she thought it could be the answer.

At Fieldstone, instructors, volunteers and staff are able to challenge Everett in encouraging ways to help him reach goals to overcome the limitations of his disability. His volunteer, Leslie, has witnessed noticeable improvement in his fine motor skills as he has learned to wrap his fingers around the reins to control his horse's speed and begin steering. His core strength has increased as he sits tall in the saddle and guides Jackson around the ring and out on trail. Riding has also empowered Everett to become more independent and discover an activity he proudly calls his own.

When asked what he likes to do, he often replies with a big wide smile, "Ride horses!"



Each week, his grandmother brings Everett to his lesson, while Rebecca comes straight from work to join them. Mother and daughter treasure this time together catching up and watching Everett progress on horseback.

Standing just three feet, five inches tall, Everett charms everyone at the barn with his impeccable manners, sweetly saying, "please," "thank you" and "you're welcome" at every opportunity. His growing confidence is evident the moment he arrives each Tuesday evening. He walks into the barn, picks out his helmet, fastens it himself, and heads off with a volunteer to bring his horse out of his stall for grooming and his lesson.

"He's so proud," Rebecca said, commenting on how much he enjoys his time at the farm. "We are so happy to have found Fieldstone."



*Everett walks alongside his volunteer, Leslie, and his horse, Jackson.*

*Cover and Photos by Kelly Kimball*

# Gaitway makes a difference in students' lives

Twenty years ago, an innovative idea became reality at Fieldstone Farm: opening a high school on the campus of our therapeutic riding center. In 2006, Gaitway High School became the first of its kind. Today, it is a national model.

Staff believed our idyllic farm setting, combined with small class sizes, individualized instruction and opportunities to connect with therapy horses would be transformational. They were right! More than 100 students have graduated from Gaitway – with many going on to college, jobs, additional training or the military.

Operated by the Educational Service Center of the Western Reserve in partnership with Fieldstone, Gaitway serves more than 20 students each year. They engage in a highly customized, rigorous curriculum aligned with the Ohio Learning Standards while developing valuable social and emotional skills working with horses.

Donna, Gaitway's licensed counselor, says students change the moment they walk into the barn. Struggles seem to fade away in the soothing presence of a horse.

Ask Nancy, the school's administrator, or the teachers and they will recount daily stories of how horses are making a difference. Sometimes, it involves a break from class to

walk into the barn, embrace their surroundings and just be close to a horse. The animals don't judge and in a world of judgement, it can help the students feel heard, understood and at peace.

The students take riding lessons, help with early morning barn chores and participate in a class to strengthen social skills. Topics include respect, boundaries, team building, mindfulness, trust and kindness.

During a recent session about perspective, students practiced role-playing. Standing beside a horse, one student repeated a prompt, "I feel like you have been avoiding me," to a classmate across from him holding another horse. She responded, "I wasn't avoiding you. I just needed some space." The boy paused, then replied, "I'm sorry if I made you feel uncomfortable."

When asked how they felt about the exchange, students responded positively and took a step forward with their horse, a symbolic gesture reinforcing the connection. Engaging is easier with a horse by their side.

Donna said she can't imagine a better place for high school students to grow and learn.

*Photo by Marty Culbertson*





Photo by Elizabeth Krouse



Photo by Marty Culbertson



## Thank you Victory Society

We are grateful to all who have named Fieldstone Farm in their wills, IRAs and other forms of planned giving.

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Cynthia Woc

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Before joining our program, every horse goes through a 60-day training and evaluation period. Our instructors and staff ride and assess each horse to ensure they are the right fit. We look for horses that are calm and patient, sound at the walk and trot and comfortable working with riders of varying abilities.

One of the most important qualities we seek is curiosity. Valorie, our Equine Director, explains, "When a horse is curious, it shows they're eager to learn and comfortable in their new environment. If they don't engage or are disinterested, it can mean they're not happy and may not be a good fit." Dora and Frenchie have made themselves right at home and we are thrilled to officially welcome them to the herd!



## Dora

A gorgeous, kind warmblood, Dora was generously donated by Morgen and Isabel Cost in December of 2025. Dora, registered as Isadora, was a show horse stabled at Madison Hills Farm and her donor, Isabel, is now a volunteer at Fieldstone. A 16-hand bay, Dora is very curious, easy-going and loves working with our riders. She was born in 2015 and we look forward to having her as part of the herd for many years to come.

## Frenchie

A good-looking, 13.3-hand, Selle Français Welsh pony cross, Frenchie joined our program in January of 2026. She was kindly donated by Ann Baird, who also donated Yogi, a former horse at Fieldstone. Born in 2004, she is registered as French Chocolate but we just call her Frenchie. She's friendly, calm and loves all the attention at Fieldstone. Bienvenue Frenchie!



*Photos by Tammie Packer*



## FIELDSTONE FARM

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*Sully (left) and Sunny D. enjoy their time in the snow. Photo by Tammie Packer.*

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### Mission

Fieldstone Farm engages the therapeutic power of our horses to discover and nurture the special abilities of individuals, families and communities.

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