

# Boston Sunday Globe

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## Lovelane in the winner's circle

### Local donors pony up for riding therapy

By Matt McDonald, Globe Correspondent | May 16, 2004

LINCOLN -- Isaiah Lombardo demands an introduction.

He was about halfway through a horseback riding lesson on a recent sunny afternoon when he stopped the show, refusing to continue until he was properly announced.

"Ladies and gentleman," instructor Lisa Williams obligingly called out, "Isaiah . . . is . . . steering."

Isaiah, 8, who has Down syndrome, has taken lessons at Lovelane Special Needs Horseback Riding Program for more than two years. He is one of many students in the program who stand to benefit from Lovelane's ambitious expansion plans.

Lovelane now operates at leased horse farms in Lincoln and Weston, but officials are building a new facility on a 5-acre site on Baker Bridge Road in Lincoln. The new site, which program founder Debby Sabin Kanzer hopes to open in September, will include two 70-by-160-foot riding rings, one outside and one inside, which will allow riding to continue even in bad weather. It will also include a 12-stall barn, a therapy room, and an office.

To help acquire the property and build the new facility, the program has raised \$3 million of a capital campaign goal of \$4 million.

Much of that came from Jim and Kim Pallotta of Wellesley, who recently donated \$500,000 along with another \$500,000 from Tudor Investment Corp., a New York company with a Boston office that Jim Pallotta runs.

"When you find somebody that wants to make a difference," Kim Pallotta said, referring to Kanzer, "it's just easy to support that."

Pallotta, a member of Lovelane's board of directors, noted that with some charitable donations, it can be hard to figure out where the money goes.

"You can see and almost touch the value of something like this," she said.

Founded by Kanzer in 1988, Lovelane serves about 65 children. While the lessons are centered around horses, they are a means to other ends for the children.

"A lot of the point of this program isn't to turn them into little equestrians. It's to maximize their potential and independence for the rest of their lives," Kanzer said.

Isaiah's mother, Angela Lombardo, has seen significant improvement.

"We've definitely seen the change this past year. He walks better, his body is straight up," said Lombardo, who

drives her son a half-hour from Somerville for the lessons.

The increased strength has an effect on other areas of Isaiah's life, too.

"The physical piece is huge," Lombardo said. "The self-confidence, the self-esteem, the risk-taking."

That's similar to improvement in other patients. The trick is that hippotherapy, as it is known from the Greek word for "horse," seems more like fun than rehabilitation.

"Because the children don't realize this is therapy, they're often more enthusiastic about the work they need to do in the hippotherapy programs," said Dr. Harry C. Webster, chief of the pediatric rehabilitation medicine division at the Floating Hospital for Children at Tufts-New England Medical Center in Boston. He has been sending patients to Lovelane and similar programs for about 15 years.

But for all the benefit, Webster noted that most health insurance plans don't cover the therapy, which, according to the program's website ([www.lovelane.org](http://www.lovelane.org)), costs about \$4,000 a year per student. Some parents pay the full amount, some benefit from an in-house subsidy that Lovelane raises money to fund, and some get financial assistance from the state.

Despite the cost, Lovelane has a waiting list of about 100, Kanzer said.

The move to Baker Bridge Road won't eliminate the waiting list, but Lovelane officials say having the indoor facility will mean they won't have to cancel lessons any more because of bad weather.

And Isaiah hates it when his lessons are canceled, his mother said.

"He lives for Fridays," she said. "He gets so upset when the weather doesn't agree with horseback riding."

Angela Lombardo sees steady progress and hopes for more.

"I don't put any limits on him," she said. "People say, 'What can your child do?' He'll do what Isaiah does." ■

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