

## Horses give a ride and a smile

By Laura Crimaldi / News Staff Writer

Wednesday, September 29, 2004



Photo by Marshall Wolff

**Good, Brighty:** Sabina Beach, 5, of Framingham, who has cerebral palsy, gives horse Brighty a pat after her riding session with the help of Lovelane Special Needs Horseback Riding Program worker Monica Wu.



Photo by Marshall Wolff

A look at the new inside ring at the Lovelane Special Needs Horseback Riding Program on Baker Bridge Road in Lincoln.

LINCOLN -- If it's Tuesday, it's a riding day for 5-year-old Sabrina Beach of Framingham. The kindergartner never forgets.

"It's something that she has that not a lot of her peers have. She can't do the running around like the other kids, but she has this. And it's amazing," Beach's father, Michael, said yesterday as he watched his daughter ride Brighty at the indoor stables at the Lovelane Special Needs Horseback Riding Program on Baker Bridge Road.

For about 30 minutes every week, Beach, who has cerebral palsy and wears leg braces, is an equestrian.

With the help of her instructors, Beach rides Brighty, including facing backward. She works on her posting

technique, a way of riding a horse that eliminates bouncing up and down in the saddle. On Saturday, she will participate in a horse show, her dad said.

All this horsing around, which Beach has enjoyed since she was 2 1/2 years old, is really therapy for the little girl. But it doesn't feel like it.

"A lot of the kids that come, they're such a hearty group of people. They get so jazzed up about this," said Debby Kanzer of Lincoln, Lovelane's founder and program director.

Eighty equestrians, from 18 months to 18 years old, participate in hippotherapy or therapeutic horseback riding at the new \$4 million facility every week. More than 150 children are on the waiting list.

The equestrians have cerebral palsy, autism, spinal cord injuries, Down syndrome, cancer and rare genetic disorders. A few are terminally ill.

On Saturday, a sold out fund-raiser will be held at a home in Weston to raise the \$500,000 necessary to finish the capital campaign that funded the new construction.

Doug Brackett Jr., 8, of Natick began riding at Lovelane in July 2003 after spending well over a year on the waiting list, said his mother, Debbie.

A third-grader at Bennett-Hemenway School in Natick, Brackett is diagnosed with Duchenne muscular dystrophy, autism, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Although Brackett is not in a wheelchair now, most children with Duchenne muscular dystrophy need a wheelchair by the time they hit early adolescence, his mother said.

Since he began horseback riding, Brackett has benefited from the social interaction, muscle strengthening and the satisfaction of giving the horse commands that the animal obeys.

"He has absolutely loved it," Debbie Brackett said.

If the adage goes, "You can bring a horse to water, but you can't make him drink," then Kanzer, an occupational therapist, attests to having the trough brought to her and drinking beyond her imagination.

The road began in high school when a car accident claimed the life of one friend and critically injured another. Later, she got a job with Special Olympics as an equestrian coach.

Although Kanzer said she was never a "horsey kid," 16 years after she founded the nonprofit program at a Weston stable owned by Elsie Rodney, Lovelane keeps growing.

"It's funny," said Kanzer. "People will say, 'Oh, it was so ambitious of you to have this goal.' Well, I never had this goal. I never had this vision."

Kanzer doesn't take credit for any of it but she has more than 100 volunteers, a staff of licensed therapeutic riding instructors and a new facility with 12 stalls on three acres.

Julia Awbrey, 5, of Weston has been riding for just over a year. Her parents became interested in hippotherapy after Julia, who is developmentally delayed, met a friend's horse and instantly connected with the animal.

One day after learning how to cup her hands to feed the live horse, Julia mimicked the technique with a toy horse at home.

Her mother, Diana, said she has seen profound improvement in her daughter's cognitive skills, attention span, fine and gross motor skills and verbal ability.

"She went from barely being able to communicate to being able to talk in complete sentences in the first year," said Diana Awbrey. "She's just a different child since she started riding."

*(Laura Crimaldi can be reached at 508-626-4416 or lcrimald@cnc.com.)*

For more information, or to volunteer or make a donation, contact:

Lovelane Special Needs Horseback Riding Program

Mailing Address:

PO Box 716, Lincoln, MA 01773

Barn and Administrative Office:

40 Baker Bridge Rd. Lincoln, MA

Phone: (781) 259-1177

Fax: (781) 259-4877

[www.lovelane.org](http://www.lovelane.org)

[LovelaneMail@aol.com](mailto:LovelaneMail@aol.com)