

2013



Riding for the Disabled Association NSW

"Bits 'n' Pieces"

Spring/Summer 2013





From the editor...

Once again another year has passed....
Looking back, I'm sure many events have been experienced by our Centres state - wide. As usual, our AGM and State Workshop was held, this year at State Office along with our photo competition and drawing competition. There are many very talented photographers and young artists out there and I, for one, look forward each year to see what the postman has delivered to Lucy in the office. Keep up the good work!
RDA has been in the limelight with volunteers being recognised for the work they do at their Centres – congratulations!!! It's keeping the RDA profile "out there" in the public domain. Centres have lost much loved equine partners – now safely with those who have gone before, in the big paddock in the sky, and to offset the losses, new ponies and horses have found good homes within the RDA caring environment.
Last, but not least, thank you to all the contributors who take the time to put together articles for "Bits 'n' Pieces" to share their Centre's "goings on" with the rest of us!

Best wishes to all RDA volunteers, members of the board, paid staff, supporters of RDA and horses.

*Have a Happy Christmas Season and a
Happy and Safe New Year*

Lyn Lazarus

NEWS FROM THE CENTRES

YOUNG

It's hard to believe another busy RDA year is nearly over.

During the last six months the weather hasn't always been kind to us with a few days missed due to rain or very wet grounds. Despite this all our riders/drivers have continued to make progress, some riding off lead for the first time. Everyone is enjoying our games.

All our horses are looking wonderful, fit and happy thanks to very generous donations of hay from local farmers. These farmers have no connection with RDA other than their extreme generosity.

2013 is Year of the Volunteer

We would like to thank our volunteers for all their efforts - there are a million and one jobs, small and large, that are cheerfully carried out to ensure our Centre works well for all involved. Here are some of the things they get up to:-



Carolyn plaiting "Billy" for the Carriage Driving Competition



Putting on birthday parties for horses, complete with birthday party food of course!!!!



Assistant Coach (top cook) and Cheryl one of our Coaches ready for the party.



Thanks to the volunteers who make the effort to drive to the RDA paddock, put out the feed and check the horses.

Jenny flexing her muscles

Volunteer Achievements

Nigel, Glen and Michael have erected a fence with a gate across the paddock making it easier for the early morning round up on RDA days. We thank Young Shire Council for supplying the funds for this project.

This year has seen the coaching team strengthened with Kathy achieving her Whip Accreditation for carriage driving and for lungeing. Alarna has her Assistant Whip, Trudy and Jenny qualified as Assistant Coaches.



President Min presenting Whip certificate to Kathy



Fiona Little presented Alarna with her Assistant Whip badge



Joan Edwards presenting badge to Trudy and Wendy Torr presenting badge to Jenny

Tania's Visit

In September we had a visit from Tania Kernaghan, a well - known country singer who is a patron of RDA. Tania and her mother spent the morning with us meeting everyone. Tania also involved herself helping us during a riding session.



Nell with Meg on "Mylie" with Tania.

Our President Retiring

Min, our President who has been volunteering here for 15 years is sadly leaving us and retiring interstate. Before she leaves us she had her first drive of a carriage and thoroughly enjoyed



Zoyie-Lee with Dave driving "Rumpy"

the experience. Everyone at the Young Centre will be sorry to farewell our President Min at the end-of-the year party. Min has been a tireless worker at our Centre for many years, driving from Jugiong each week. She will be greatly missed. We wish Min and her husband Michael a very happy retirement.

Young is a thriving country town in the heart of the Hilltops Food and Wine Region of the South West Slopes of NSW. On the 3rd and 4th May 2014 Young RDA Centre will host the RDA NSW AGM and two day Coaching Workshop. We look forward to welcoming everyone to our RDA Centre situated at the Young Pony Club grounds adjacent to the Young Showgrounds. The programme will be distributed once it is approved by CASP.

We wish everyone a very Happy Christmas and a Safe and Prosperous New Year

Wauchope/Port Macquarie

What a beautiful day it turned out to be for our turn to host the RDA Mounted Games for the Mid North Coast Region on Saturday 31st August 2013.

Our games were well attended by 38 riders from Kempsey Macleay in mauve and purple, Manning Great Lakes in their yellow and gold and Wauchope/Port Macquarie in our blue and red new shirts, halters and leads. Kendall also joined us to help out for the day. The Wauchope Showground arena proved perfect for the flag race, bending, barrels and keyhole events.

All events ran smoothly and miraculously on time with all races finishing in time to have presentations before lunch. Camping was also attended by some coaches and horses from Manning.

Thanks to the Westpac Rescue Helicopter volunteers for supplying a lovely morning tea and wonderful BBQ lunch with cold drinks, tea and coffee and undercover seated area.

Thank you to our announcer for the day Bernard Browne from Wesport High School who did a wonderful job. Much appreciation goes to Gerry Walsh who took some great photos and of course our volunteers who helped set up our events on Friday afternoon and their help throughout the day.

Congratulations to all the riders who participated and helped make it a great Regional event.



Joshua Howard & "Tyson" in the flag



Karli Quirk & "Fairy" negotiating the barrel



Mounted Games Group

WAGGA WAGGA

Wagga's new bus!



RDA Wagga Centre has been able to purchase an eight seater wheelchair friendly bus through the generous support of the Wagga community – the fundraising efforts of the Army Recruit Training Centre, Kapooka and through a \$30,000.00 grant from the Beyond Bank* Regional Fund.

This enables even more clients to benefit from the Centre's facilities, as we can now pick up children from local schools that have not had their own means of transport

to and from the Centre for lessons. The bus will also be used to transport riding coaches to RDA events throughout the district. Having only six clients 40 years ago when the Centre first opened, the new addition of the bus means that the Centre's opportunities can now be offered to even more people. We now have more than 100 clients visit each week. It is a highlighting point in the Centre's history, which couldn't have been achieved without the hard work of all our volunteers, the generosity of the Wagga community, the Army Recruit Training Centre, Kapooka and the support from Beyond Bank.



Above from left: General Manager Community CPS Peter Rutter, Community Co-ordinator, WMCU Karen Garrod, WMCU Regional Manager Andrew Toole, Commandant Kapooka Colonel David Hay and RDA Wagga President Bev Amery
Left: Lake Albert Primary School students are the first to sit in the new bus with RDA Wagga President Bev Amery

*Beyond Bank previously known as Wagga Mutual

“Tall Timbers”

**“GIANT STEPS” MOVES AHEAD IN LEAPS AND BOUNDS
AT RDA “TALL TIMBERS”** By Sam Kershler, Teacher



“Giant Steps” is a special-needs school in Gladesville where students of all ages are guided by teachers and full-time therapists through a range of curriculum-based and life skills programs. Students have participated in the RDA program for a number of years now and have accomplished some amazing things over the years.

This year one of our infants’

classes has participated in the program which the students have found incredibly beneficial. As part of the program students have participated in a range of interactive, problem solving games as well as having the opportunity to go on a couple of trail rides through the country, an activity which has been extremely enjoyable and relaxing for students and staff alike.

As part of the program, students have been matched with RDA volunteers and horses with whom many have developed quite a bond. Students developed their basic skills as riders whilst also interacting with a wider range of adults within the community. The volunteers at the RDA are of an exceptional quality and it has been wonderful to have the experience to head out to the country each Tuesday morning to be greeted by their kindness, warmth and sense of humour.



TOTS ON HORSEBACK AT "ALL TIMBERS" CENTRE

By Brianna

Hi my name is Brianna, I'm 5 years old. I have been riding at "Tall Timbers" for one year and a half. My favourite part about riding is spending time on my horse "Mr Poppet". I love playing games on him and going up to the big oval to do special things. "Mr Poppet" is my third horse. I first started riding "Indi" then I changed to "Pippa" - she was such a pretty horse, but I really love "Mr Poppet" - he is so nice and soft and always looks so pretty. "Mr Poppet" always needs to go to the toilet when I'm riding him and that's really funny!

I love going to horse riding every week because horse riding is very special and I love to tell my friends all about it. I really like my teacher Nicole (*Fleming*) and all the helpers because they are all very nice to me.



"As long as we have memories, Yesterday remains;

As long as we have hope, Tomorrow waits;

As long as we have friendship, Today is beautiful".

Cowra

The Cowra Guardian, Friday, June 14,



Current Riding for the Disabled Volunteers, Coaches and Assistant Coaches
Back Row: Kaye Falls, Bob Chater (farrier), Tom McSorley, Walter Novelli, Lyn Webb, Dudley Nicholson (president and assistant coach)
Middle Row: Pam Cowan, Frances Duff, Michelle Smith, Carol Nicholson (assistant coach), Joyce Clarke (secretary), Jennifer Wright
Front Row: Diane Ebdon (publicity officer), Tracey McKay (coach), Len Crowe (vice president and head coach), Joy Webster (assistant coach), Raelene Searle and Terri Mooney

For What It's Worth

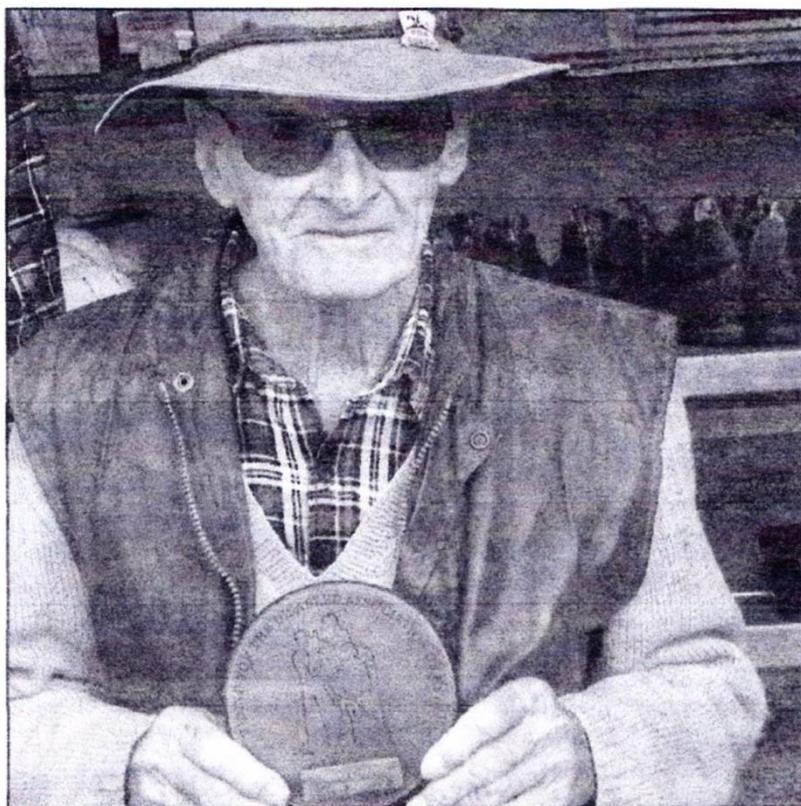
He's not the man from Snowy River
 Though he rides every bit as well,
 He's not the Dirranbandi Dandi
 For he never was a swell.

He's one of nature's gentlemen,
 Son of the Central West,
 No matter what he's doing
 He always gives his best.



He decided 20 years ago
 To help Cowra's special kids
 And started Cowra RDA
 Let's not put it on the skids.

By pulling all together
 I hope we can all strive
 Each one to do their very best
 To keep Len Crowe's dream alive
 D.M.E.



Len Crowe started RDA 20 years ago and has kept it going ever since.

Recognition for Len's twenty year saddle ride

Riding for Disabled Association Official Olwen Smith from Cootamundra Branch recently visited Cowra RDA to present an award for twenty years of service to Cowra's Special Needs Community.

The man who started it all, Len Crowe, was there as he has been unfailingly for the last twenty years to accept the award which came as a complete surprise to him.

While the children, adults and Volunteers, except Terri Mooney and Len have come and gone in that time, the main thing that hasn't changed is the delighted cries of our riders "look at me Mr Crowe I'm trotting". Quite an achievement!

With the progress of time has come the progress of rules and regulations, insurance needs etc.

We are currently revamping our equipment to keep up with these changes.

We supply the children with safety helmets and boots to use whilst they are riding, obviously we need a variety of sizes as they need to fit properly to ensure safety.

We have recently gained four new little riders whose feet are too small for our

current supply of boots so if you have a small (under size 12) pair of elastic sided boots with smooth soles in good condition that your child has outgrown or can help us finance some new pairs, your help would be very much appreciated. The boots and helmets remain the property of RDA and are regularly cleaned and recycled.

Cowra RDA is, we believe, the only branch that pays our riders RDA registration.

The cost per child is seventy five dollars which puts quite a dent in our fundraising receipts as we currently have thirty seven riders on our books.

The joy on their faces however makes it all worthwhile.

Please phone Dudley or Carol on 6342 6774, Joyce on 6342 5692 or Di on 6344 3656 if you can help in any way either by donation or volunteering or perhaps you could just bring along a cheque to the Pony Club grounds behind the Showground on a Wednesday morning between 8:30 and 12 noon.

We promise we won't turn you away.
- Cowra Riding for the Disabled

2013 - A year of great change...

The year for Cowra RDA has been challenging but, as always, rewarding. Up until now we have relied on volunteers bringing their own horses in every Wednesday but a few hiccups have convinced us that we need to have our own RDA horses so that they are always available when we need them. Last year we received our first RDA horse, "Kimba", but unfortunately his handler has withdrawn him from service.

The donation and arrival of the beautiful "Mintie", who we are finding to be just as sweet as his name suggests, will make it possible for one of our foundation riders, Michelle, to again fulfil her desire to ride and share that euphoria only the partnership with a horse can give you.

We have also added to our stable the gorgeous "Crystal" who has been with us on loan for several years now. To have "Crystal" as a full time RDA horse is heaven sent.





Another of our long term loan horses, "Jack", has been kindly donated to us by his owners. It is wonderful to have these horses which we know so well and can trust with our precious charges as permanent members of Cowra RDA.

Last, but certainly not least, is the cute as a button "Snowy", who has also recently joined our team thanks to the generosity of his owners. He is fast finding himself a place in the hearts of all.

We topped off this ever improving year with the graduation of Joy Webster from Assistant Coach to Coach. Congratulations Joy! Also, with two qualified Assistant

Coaches and a very dedicated band of

volunteers RDA Cowra is in a very strong position to enter the coming years.

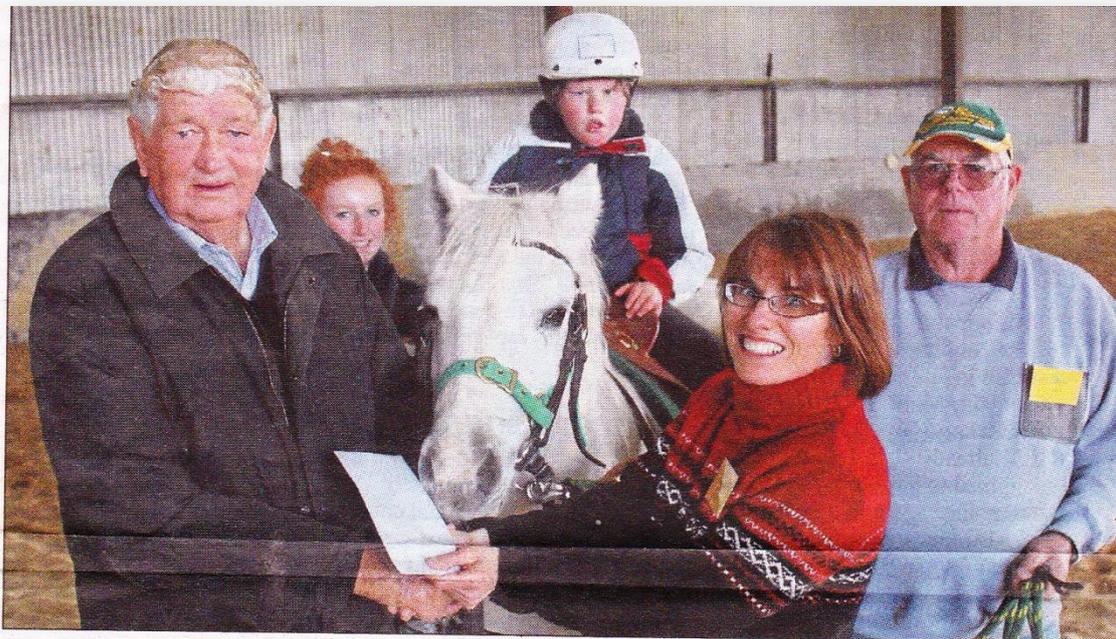
Our horses are agisted free of charge thanks to a local couple and one of our members. They have all been vaccinated against Hendra.



Our wish list has shrunken considerably but it would be nice if we could find a pony about 13:2 to 14hh to complete our size range.

A double float of our own would also be very welcome but, all in all, our year has reached such dizzying heights in the last few weeks perhaps we should just rest on our laurels and enjoy!

Goulburn



Young riders receive a boost

By **ANTONY DUBBER**

THE Goulburn branch of Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) has received a financial boost this week thanks to a generous donation from Goulburn District Racing Club.

On Tuesday morning, president Fred Cooper presented the Association with a cheque for \$1000.

RDA runs two horse riding groups for children with disabilities including Crescent School students, as well as local primary and high school attendees with special needs.

President Bronwyn Warren told the *Post Weekly* that volunteers from the group carry out a number of tasks to educate the children about the horses.

"Our committed and skilled volunteers lead the horses, keeping riders safe and ensuring they have a great time," she said.

"They also prepare, groom, tack up and feed the horses, and teach the

children to learn how to look after horses.

"Students from Trinity Catholic College and Goulburn High School work as part of these teams, walking alongside the riders and help them to have fun while staying safe. They also assist the kids with climbing up into the saddle and getting back down again."

She said RDA Awareness Week was coming up, from July 29 to August 4, which celebrates everything to do with the initiative.

"We are celebrating the children and young people who, whilst affected by a disability, rise to the challenge of learning to ride," Ms Warren said.

She said that the RDA was indebted to their local supporters such as the Goulburn District Racing Club, the Goulburn Rodeo Club, the Workers Club, 'Convoy for Kids' and the Veolia Mulwaree Trust.

"Without the support from these organisations, Goulburn RDA would

be unable to provide this quality riding program," she said.

"The costs for the RDA are extensive, and include the purchase of new helmets, equipment, tack, feed, the health/maintenance of our horses plus the insurance fees."

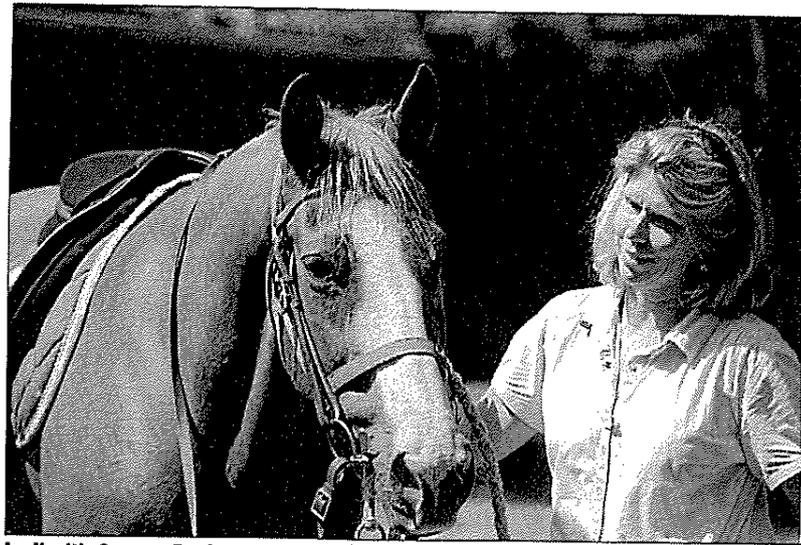
Goulburn District Racing Club president Fred Cooper said that he was happy to support the great work Riding for the Disabled does.

"We are going to make this donation an annual event from now on," he said.

"The RDA does great work in our community for these kids, and gives them opportunities they wouldn't have otherwise had."

The RDA meets every second Tuesday of the month during school terms at the Rosemont Riding Centre on Rosemont Rd, approximately 8kms outside Goulburn.

For more information about RDA contact president Bronwyn Warren on 4822 0807 or treasurer/secretary Alex Fry on 4822 2706.



Ludi with Genene Roche.

Ludi learns to adapt to disability

A MUCH loved member of the Manning Great Lakes Riding for the Disabled family received a serious operation at the end of last year.

The 2012 local RDA Horse of the Year, Ludi suffered for a long time before vets could determine what was wrong with his left eye.

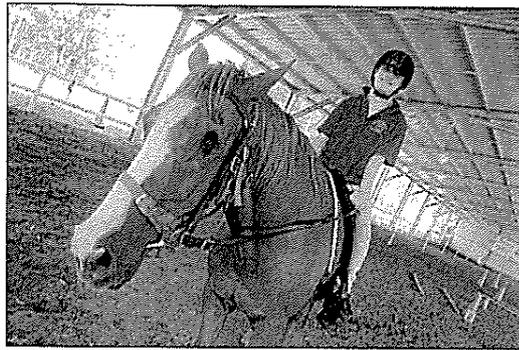
Ludi made up RDA's 'team' for the 2012 Royal Show in Sydney, helped to carry his riders to fourth place in the State Mounted Games Championships, and won a clear round in the show jumping and rosettes in dressage at the Australian National Championships in Victoria, earning National Walk Champion of Australia, all while suffering extreme pain in one eye, despite attempts to help him.

Ludi had been receiving veterinary attention for irritation in one of his eyes, that initially improved with help and continued medication, but just before Christmas last year his condition worsened again and it was decided to hospitalise him.

During treatment in hospital, a foreign body was discovered in Ludi's eye that had to be removed, leaving a small hole that was expected to heal.

However the hole continued to leak fluid and there was no other option but to remove his eye completely.

Ludi has now made an excellent recovery and with special care and training he is once again a very happy, healthy horse, adjusting to his



Ludi and Ryan O'Neal who were a successful team and Australian National Champions in Victoria.

new condition and performing with promise in all of his former activities.

All the horses are adored by the people at Manning Great Lakes RDA and the organisation is always looking for more horses to join the family and help other people with disabilities realise the wonders of horse riding.

They are putting a call out for anyone who may have, or know of someone, looking to re-home or sell a horse that is no longer getting ridden or due to other circumstances.

"Please consider enabling us to assure him or her of a good, loving home," said Maureen Turner from MGLRDA.

For further information about the RDA or re-homing a horse, phone the centre on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

They are also available on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month or contact 0418 976 531 at any time.

Alternatively you can call in and see them on those days.



CENTRAL COAST

my name is not *"Rose"* (but it could be)...

The one sure thing an individual has, is a name. Most have several. A celebrity may boast just one if the status is there.

We are often named after members of our family, distant or present. Nicknames are liked, loathed or tolerated. Some are endearing. During my first week in Australia (fresh from the U.K) the postman called me 'mate'. I was quite taken aback as I had assumed that that terminology was restricted to the male gender. A nickname can also be the product of a mispronounced attempt by (often) a younger sibling while learning how to speak.

What of the names we give our domestic animals? They can be traditional, sophisticated, majestic, mythical, quirky or imaginative.

The question is: How did our horses and ponies get their names? At RDA a horse or pony is (generally) brought into the fold as an older animal. They have to adapt to new surroundings, find their place with an established herd and respond to many unfamiliar hands. Their name is the one constant that travels with them. They have heard it called or whispered a thousand times and more.

We have a Jack, Albert and Harry. Good strong names. Toffee – because he is the colour of a splendid chewy treat. Casper, a grey, named (we think) after a friendly ghost (but with a slightly different spelling). Gone now but not forgotten is Apollo – maybe his previous owner liked Greek mythology and Snowy and Sandy – no guessing what natural substances their colouring resembled. We also have Buntly. Buntly? Now where did that name come from? It was quite remiss of us not to ask the question "Why that name?" There could well be an interesting tale to pass on.

I once knew an Appaloosa called Stripey. His owner had a great sense of humour. The silliness of it made most people smile. Not a bad thing.

Then there was Killer. He was an ex-rodeo horse given a name far removed from the truth of his real temperament.

It is obvious that names are important. The bond between human and animal is strengthened when a horse hears his name and with ears pricked forward, listens.

What name/s at your Centre delight, impress, puzzle or inspire you to find out more? It would be an interesting exercise if each Centre were to let Bits 'n' Pieces know the names of their equine team/s. Chances are, there would be some double ups – we have had our share of ponies called Thunder.

Maureen Trotter

Central Coast Centre



**2013/14 Yellow Pages® and White Pages® caption for
Port Stephens directory**

Theme: 'Keeping Our Communities Healthy'

Jan Sharp is inspiring Port Stephens residents with a disability to saddle up for increased confidence and mobility.

In 1980, Jan joined the Raymond Terrace branch of the Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA), recognising the ability of horse riding to strengthen muscles, increase mobility and boost the confidence of people with a disability.

A voluntary coach for many years, Jan has also held numerous leadership roles at the local branch. In 1997, Jan assisted in securing funding to build a covered arena so local people could enjoy the therapeutic benefits of horse riding in all weather.

In 2003, Jan was elected onto the RDA New South Wales Board of Directors where she has helped shape the organisation's safety and coaching guidelines while also overseeing the financial management of 35 RDA branches.

A committed volunteer, Jan is using the gentle nature of horses to improve the confidence and wellbeing of local people with a disability.



Photo and caption that is the cover on the Yellow and White Pages telephone directory for the Port Stephens area - a winner for RDA Raymond Terrace & Lower Hunter Centre

Musical Ride Competition 2013

Musical Ride with a Theme or Story - Led

1st place:	Bathurst	"Post Horn Gallop"
2nd place:	Manning Great Lakes	"Gummy Bears"

Musical Ride with a Theme or Story – Unled

1st place:	Manning Great Lakes	"You Raise Me Up"
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Drill Ride to Music – Led

1st place:	Wagga	"Africa"
2nd place:	Wauchope/Port Macquarie	"We Will Rock You"
3rd place:	Kendall	"Kendall Country Drill Ride"

Drill Ride to Music – Unled

1st place:	Manning Great Lakes	"Shining Stars"
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Congratulations!

Raymond Terrace & Lower Hunter Centre

who won the RDA United Kingdom International Video Competition 2013 with the 2012 DVD Musical Ride with a Theme or Story - led that came

1st place:	"Tribute to Col Campbell"
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Chincoteague Ponies of America



Two herds of wild horses make their home on Assateague Island, separated by a fence at the Maryland-Virginia line. These small but sturdy, shaggy horses have adapted to their environment over the years by eating dune and marsh grasses and drinking fresh water from ponds. While they appear tame, they are wild, and Park Rangers urge visitors not to feed or pet them. The

Maryland herd is managed by the National Park Service. The Virginia herd is owned by the Chincoteague Volunteer Fire Company. Each year the Chincoteague Volunteer Fire Company purchases a grazing permit from the National Fish & Wildlife Service. This permit allows the Fire Company to maintain a herd of approximately 150 adult ponies on Assateague Island. The Fire Company controls the herd size with a pony auction on the last Thursday in July. Each year tens of thousands of spectators come to watch the Saltwater Cowboys swim the pony herd from Assateague Island to Chincoteague Island.

HISTORY OF THE CHINCOTEAGUE PONIES Wild ponies have inhabited Assateague Island for hundreds of years. Some have suggested that the wild ponies of Assateague trace their origin to horses released to forage on the Island by early settlers. However, the evidence strongly suggests that they are the descendants of the survivors of a Spanish galleon which wrecked off the coast of Assateague. This story, which has been passed from generation to generation on Chincoteague Island, is stronger than fiction.

If you've ever seen a shipwreck map of the mid Atlantic coastline, then you know that there were a remarkable number of shipwrecks. Before modern navigation, ships used lighthouses and the stars to navigate at night. This worked well until a bad storm came up or heavy fog set in, which impaired visibility. This caused ships to get off course and hit sandbars along the coast. This would usually occur during a storm and the large waves would beat the wooden ship apart. The large number of shipwrecks, together with the fact that it was very common for ships to be transporting ponies to the Colonies or South America, makes it very likely that ponies originally got to Assateague from a shipwreck.

A recent book written by Mr. John Amrhein, "The Hidden Galleon", suggests the local story about the Spanish galleon is true. In the book he describes the wreck of the La Galga in 1750, its location, the circumstances surrounding the voyage, the great storm of 1749 which decimated all the livestock on Assateague Island prior to the La Galga wreck, and the appearance of "Beach" Ponies shortly after the demise of the La Galga, and other evidence. While not absolute the circumstantial evidence he presents is very powerful. Mr. Amrhein is appealing to do an archaeological investigation of the site where he believes the La Galga lies buried on Assateague Island.

HISTORY OF PONY PENNING Penning began as a way for livestock owners to claim, brand, break and harness their loose herds. By the 1700's it had become an annual event, complete with drinking, eating and plenty of revelry by the entire community. The earliest known description of Pony Penning was published in 1835. The practice was then already an "ancient" custom held in June on Assateague Island. Penning on Chincoteague Island is not mentioned until the mid-1800's, and it believed to have been begun by two islanders who owned large herds that grazed on Chincoteague.

The penning continued on both islands for years. By 1885 they were held on Assateague one day and Chincoteague the next. Assateague also had a Sheep Penning, which is believed to be a custom even older than the others. Word of the events began to spread, and hotels and boarding houses were booked for the festivities. In 1909, the last Wednesday and Thursday of July were set as the official dates for the yearly events. As Pony Penning increased in popularity, Assateague's Sheep Penning wound down and was discontinued by 1914.

MODERN DAY PONY PENNING After a string of disastrous fires in the Town of Chincoteague, the villagers realized their fire fighting equipment was seriously inadequate. In 1925 the town authorized the Chincoteague Volunteer Fire Company to hold a carnival during Pony Penning to raise funds. That year over 15 colts were sold to benefit the fire company, and the carnival was a huge success. Bolstered by the interest in the pony swim, visitors began arriving from across the country for the annual penning. The crowd in 1937 was estimated at 25,000. The increased revenue from the carnivals and auctions enabled the fire company to modernize its equipment and facilities, and in 1947 it began to build its own herd by purchasing ponies from local owners. They moved the herd to Assateague where the government allowed publicly owned, not private, herds to graze on the newly established Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge.

That same year, 1947, Marguerite Henry published "Misty of Chincoteague", the story that made Pony Penning internationally famous. A movie followed, as did several sequel books. The tale of the wild pony Phantom, her foal Misty and the children who buy and raise her has become a classic, still loved and enjoyed by each new generation.

Pony Penning is still held in July during the Chincoteague Volunteer Firemen's Carnival. "Salt Water Cowboys" herd the horses across the narrowest part of Assateague Channel at low tide, after which they are examined by veterinarians. After a resting period, they are herded through town to a corral at the Carnival Grounds where they stay until the next day's auction. The Pony Auction not only provides a source of revenue for the fire company, but it also serves to trim the herd's numbers. To retain the permit to graze on the refuge, the herd must not exceed 150 horses.

Each year thousands of people flock to Chincoteague Island to watch the Pony Penning and enjoy the Firemen's Carnival. For many of them, the trek to the shores of Assateague Channel on the last Wednesday and Thursday of July has become an annual event, an opportunity to participate in a tradition older than the country itself.

MORE ABOUT THE CHINCOTEAGUE PONIES The Chincoteague Pony became an official registered breed in 1994. The average height of a Chincoteague Pony is between 12

and 13 hands. Chincoteague Ponies are stocky, with short legs, thick manes, and large, round bellies.

Assateague Island is a harsh environment for the Ponies and their diet is limited. The Ponies have adapted to the limited diet over the hundreds of years they have lived on Assateague. The Ponies primarily eat the salt water cord grass that grows in the marshes on Assateague Island. They eat almost all day just to get enough nutrition from this diet to sustain themselves. The salt content of the cord grass is very high. To compensate for all the salt in the cord grass they drink twice as much water as a normal horse. This is why their bellies appear so bloated.

The wild ponies on Assateague Island congregate in small groups, called "bands". Each band has one dominate stallion and the rest are mares that the stallion breeds with. The number of mares a particular stallion has in his band is dependent upon how dominate the stallion is. The stronger the stallion the more mares he is able to win when fighting other stallions on the Island. The dominate stallion will kick his male offspring out of the band after a couple of years, once the colt has reached sexual maturity. Young bachelor males tend to form their own small band, until they become big and strong enough to begin fighting for and winning mares from other stallions. Likewise, female offspring are eventually chased off by their mother to prevent inbreeding.

On average around 70 new foals are born every spring, on the Virginia side of Assateague Island. Approximately 75 % of the mature mares have foals each year, a relatively high foaling rate for wild horses. A mare can become pregnant again once her foal has stopped nursing. And with an 11 month gestational cycle many of the mares are pregnant almost year around!

The Chincoteague Volunteer Fire Company, who owns and manages the herd, maintains the herd size at about 150 adult ponies. The Fire Company controls the size of the herd by auctioning off most of the foals at the annual Pony Auction in July. Each year just a few select foals are designated as 'buybacks'. A buyback pony is auctioned with the stipulation that it will be donated back to the Fire Company and returned to Assateague Island to replenish the herd. The winner of a buyback pony gets to name the pony before it is returned to Assateague Island to live out its life there. Buyback ponies have actually become some of the highest priced foals sold at the auction.

- 2013 auction results: 55 ponies sold, average cost \$2,000.00,
- **high bid \$12,000**, low bid \$650, **total sales \$113,975.**
- 2012 auction results: 67 ponies sold, average cost \$1,436.00,
- **high bid \$7,000**, low bid \$400, **total sales \$96,252.**
- 2011 auction results: 69 ponies sold, average cost \$1,442.00,
- **high bid \$6,700**, low bid \$450, **total sales \$99,500.**
- 2010 auction results: 59 ponies sold, average cost \$1,310.00,
- **high bid \$8,100**, low bid \$375, **total sales \$77,275.**
- 2009 auction results: 70 ponies sold, average cost \$1,344.29,
- **high bid \$11,700**, low bid \$500, **total sales \$94,100.**
- 2008 auction results: 74 ponies sold, average cost \$1,413.85,
- **high bid \$9,500**, low bid \$400, **total sales \$104,625.**
- 2007 auction results: 73 ponies sold, average cost \$2,442.47 (record),
- **high bid \$17,500** (record), low bid \$700, **total sales \$104,625**

Each year the Fire Company designates a few ponies (usually between 3 to 5) as "Buy Backs". A Buy Back Pony is a foal that is designated by the Fire Company to return to Assateague Island to live out it's life there. The Buy Back Pony will be auctioned with the rest of the foals. The winner of a Buy Back Pony will get to name the Pony before it is returned to Assateague. Buy Back Ponies replenish the herd on Assateague. Buy Back Ponies have actually become some of the highest priced ponies sold at the auction.

On Friday, the adult ponies will make the return swim to Assateague Island where they will live in the wild for another year.



The corralled ponies



Swimming from the island



down the street to the fair ground



down the street to the fair ground



Fabio, the chestnut stallion



Poco-latte, the buckskin mare & her foal

Cavalía



Natalija Lambert and Christine Douglas (also below) meeting two of the *Cavalía* horses.

Equine encounter delights children

VICTORIA HANNAFORD

THEY'RE used to putting on a spectacular show for a large audience but yesterday the magnificent horses of *Cavalía* displayed a more sensitive side — meeting a group of blind and visually impaired children.

There were tentative first encounters, squeals of delight and confessions of undying love as the group groomed and fed the horses, and listened to the animals' heartbeat through a stethoscope, during a behind-the-scenes "Blind Touch Tour".

Christine Douglas, 9, had been

looking forward to meeting the horses.

"It's pretty exciting for me because I like animals," Christine said.

"If you're alone in life, animals can keep you company."

The group was joined by visually impaired equestrian champion and Paralympian Sue-Ellen Lovett, who encouraged the children to pursue their goals regardless of visual impairment.

Lovett, ranked in the top 10 per cent of Australian dressage riders, began riding from an early age. "I am really lucky. I live to get up every morning and feed my horse and, through my horses, I have gone all over the world riding and represented Australia six times."

