

Horseback riding has benefits for students of all ages

By CHEYENNE LORD

Beth Kelly of Aurora has been riding for the majority of her adult life. The retired school teacher has owned horses and competed successfully at top hunter shows, but this summer she experienced riding in a whole new way.

Kelly, 70, shared her riding and lesson time with her 12-year-old granddaughter, Molly, a novice rider, when the two joined the new Chagrin Valley Farms (CVF) Membership program.

Chagrin Valley Farms' Membership, a different take on horse leasing, offered them the responsibility of owning horses without the long-term commitment. During the program's monthly term, Kelly and her granddaughter rode two or three times each week in lessons as well as unstructured rides.

"I was horse crazy all my life but didn't ride much as a kid," Kelly said. "It's fun to see Molly riding and seeing her benefit from it as a health-growth experience where you have to put the animal first and care about another living thing."

Research shows there are many benefits to horseback riding. According to the Certified Horsemanship Association, riding involves physical and mental skills such as balance and coordination, problem-solving, and muscle strength and stamina. There are also social and competitive aspects, as riders work together to care for their horses or bring home ribbons from a show.

"Certainly, riding has many physical benefits, promoting general fitness and overall muscle strength," Kelly said. "Mentally, I have found so much serenity while working with these gentle giants. Many times I have driven out to the barn, worried about something that was going on in my life, but never gave it another thought once I was with my horse."

Balancing her classroom duties with riding while she was teaching was challenging for Kelly, but she always found time to do both. "For me, it was a love affair that began while I was very young and lasted a lifetime," she said. She even shared her passion with her students on a yearly field trip to CVF, which they and their parents enjoyed.

Although their shared experience ended when summer ended, Kelly said Molly might continue to ride in lessons going forward and has even thought about competing. Kelly also plans to keep riding on her own time as long as possible, adding, "Your body will tell you when it is time to stop."

According to CVF instructor Sonja Densmore, the



Photograph by Cheyenne Lord

Beth Kelly of Aurora enjoys horseback riding with her granddaughter Molly at Chagrin Valley Farms. They ride as part of a new Chagrin Valley Farms Membership Program, a different take on horse leasing, which offers the responsibility of owning horses without the long-term commitment.

best part about working with horses is getting away from everyday life. "I get to just have fun, doing something physical but not horribly physical," she said.

"It's different from going to the gym or something more involved," another CVF adult lesson student, Elle Henig, said. "You kind of get lost (in your thoughts) at the barn."

The 26-year-old Clevelander calls herself an "activity collector." She works at the Cleveland Orchestra's administrative offices, and her pastimes include archery, rock climbing, fencing, and now, horseback riding.

Henig decided to try riding lessons this summer after

only being on a horse three times before for trail-riding. "I just think if it's something you're remotely interested in, you might as well try it," she said.

Although some may consider horseback riding a sport for the young, adult riders are also enjoying the physical rewards of exercising with a horse, as well as the mental benefits of accomplishing their goals. Fortunately, riders won't have to stop for winter, as Chagrin Valley Farms helps make riding a pleasant year-round sport with heated indoor riding arenas. To learn more, visit ChagrinValley-Farms.com.