

Celebrating 50 Years at MANE STREAM

Article by Lee C. Wolfe

Photos Courtesy of Mane Stream



It's a year of reflection and a time to look ahead as Mane Stream, a premier therapeutic riding center for children and adults with special needs, celebrates its 50th anniversary.

A half-century is a short span in the millennia-old relationship of humans and horses, but at Mane Stream in Oldwick, it's long enough to make an impact that lasts for hundreds of lifetimes. The second oldest facility of its kind in the country, Mane Stream was founded by equestrian Octavia Brown, who was considered a pioneer when she founded an adaptive riding program on her farm in Bedminster, NJ in 1972. Brown was a visionary in the fledgling field and one of the earliest proponents to understand that the relationship between horse and rider is a joyful, transcendent experience shared by those with and without special needs. She knew from early experience working with horses and patients at a psychiatric hospital, that lessons in horsemanship and trail riding offer tremendous physical and emotional therapeutic possibilities.

"Octavia had this great vision - horses can be for everyone," said Trish Hegeman, Executive Director. "And we can teach horseback riding to everyone and they can have that connection with the animals and the same benefits that everyone has."

Brown's mission centered on adaptive horsemanship; lessons and trail riding for clients with special needs who wouldn't be able to ride in a typical barn environment.

"We adapt our lessons to meet the needs of the client," Hegeman explained. "The goal is to make riders as independent as

possible. Some of our riders hardly have control over anything in their lives. There's not a lot of circumstances where they're able to be independent. This gives them an opportunity to do that and have the horse as a partner, a sort of, we're in this together kind of thing."

Brown's first rider was 7-year old Tracy Cole, whose doctor at Easter Seals of Morristown gave her the choice of learning to swim or ride horses. Like many 7-year old girls her age, she dreamed of having a pony and chose the saddle. "It was the best choice I ever made," she recently wrote in an article for Mane Stream. "I discovered how much fun it could be to gallop up the hill and wait for everyone else to catch up with me for a change."

Since moving to its current facility in Oldwick, Mane Stream has integrated clinical therapy into their program, which involves licensed occupational, physical, or speech-language therapists, who incorporate traditional forms of therapy with hippotherapy, using horses in a variety of integrative strategies and taking advantage of children's natural tendency to want to interact with the horse and the bonds they develop.

"The fact that you're using a horse, instead of a ball, or weights... that's what we bring to the table. The ability to use the horse," said Hegeman. "The horse's movement is really good for people's bodies. It will get them really centered... It will stimulate them in the right way that they're going to be able to concentrate on the goals that they have for that session. We're unusual in that we have real-



An early photo Octavia Brown and a rider at her fledgling program.

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EFH Horse Show

Cedar Lane Farm – September 10

Master's Chase

Countryside Alliance of Somerset Hills Event
Natirar – October 8

Hunter Pace

Cedar Lane Farm – October 23

Opening Meet and Hunt Ball

November 5





ly deep practices in both.”

Currently, Mane Stream is bustling with over 100 riders, a stable of specially selected ponies, and up to 70 volunteers a week, but after 50 years there are “literally 1,000s of people who have been touched by Mane Stream,” and Hegeman has been celebrating the lives of many of them in a chronological history of people and horses on their website that was created especially for the 50th anniversary.

“I thought we could celebrate 50 people for 50 years,” said Hegeman. “From Octavia to Tracy Cole... it’s a big cross slice of people who are important to the organization.”

Among the memories of staff and riders, are stories of Mane Stream’s “heartbeat”- their volunteers, who will tell you that they get back as much as they give. Some have gone on to serve on Mane Stream’s board and others have been inspired to pursue careers in hippotherapy and returned to work as members of the staff.

“Our model is definitely that you need volunteers - and you need a lot of volunteers. We’re a big ask, physically. You get dirty. You have to deal with the horses. You have to get super-intimate with the person,” said Hegeman. “I would say two-thirds of our volunteers come because they want to work with the horses and a third come because they want to work with our population, but I would say that 100% of them totally benefit from the interaction,” she told us. “Think about it. 50 years - hundreds of volunteers - that’s amazing. What an incredible impact.”



Hegeman also cites the support from the community as key to their growth and success over the last five-decades.

“We’re deep in horse country here,” she pointed out. “We get support from people around us. People think of us when they want to donate. Being part of the fabric of Hunterdon County and the community, that’s fantastic for us. We don’t take that role for granted... We’re the kind of organization too, that if you give us \$5 it’s impactful. It can buy a bag of mints that we give to the horses. Or you can give us \$5,000 and we can buy feed. We’re really happy to be a part of this community.”

Thankfulness is a big part of Mane Stream’s 50th anniversary celebration and this year’s EQUUS event, co-chaired by Board vice president, Laura Brucker; emeritus director, Marianne Walsh Saladino; and director Emily Maillet Kellogg, is appropriately dubbed the Gratitude Gala. Scheduled for Saturday, October 1, 2022, from 6:00 to 11:00 p.m. at USET, guests will experience dinner served in the incredible United States Equestrian Team arena and stroll the stalls to bid on items at the silent auction.

“These days, having something to celebrate is a good thing,” said Hegeman. “We are so impactful for our participants. And having people come together and realize that, it’s something to be celebrated. Putting a smile on someone’s face is not something to be taken for granted, and the fact that we do that every day and have been doing that every day for 50 years...I’m just going to lean really heavily into that right now.”





Mane Stream is located at 83 Old Turnpike Road, in Oldwick, NJ. To learn more about their programs, volunteer opportunities, and upcoming events like the Gratitude Gala and their popular Annual Tack Sale, please visit www.manestreamnj.org.

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