

Long Island Hall of Fame Archive Project

Archive Project

Inception to Induction

Pal-O-Mine Equestrian

Year Founded: January 1996

Issue addressed: Disabilities

Induction Category and Year: Health, 2006

Founder: Lisa Gatti

Personal Quote from Founder: “We enrich every life through horses”

History: While studying at Mary Washington University in Virginia, Lisa Gatti’s inspiration for Pal-O-Mine came from Palomino, a book that her father gave her in 1993. That same year, Lisa and long time friend, Lori Sorensen, started what was then called The Red Barn Therapeutic Riding Program. Three years later they were incorporated and changed their name to Pal-O-Mine Equestrian. Before they found their current home in Islandia, NY, the organization moved an astounding seven times before accidentally stumbling on the eight-acre property they own today.

Agency Mission: Pal-O-Mine Equestrian is a nonprofit organization based in Islandia, NY, that is dedicated to helping students with neurological disorders achieve their maximum level of muscle function. Pal-O-Mine also has programs for physically and cognitively challenged individuals who work with their licensed professional therapists and their thoroughly trained horses. Their main goal is to help improve the lives of all the students they teach. With help from their volunteers, they hope to give every student a comfortable and enjoyable experience.

Population Served: Any person with a disability is welcome at Pal-O-Mine. They have students ranging from age two to seventy. People with neurological disorders, mental retardation, autism, and Down Syndrome are treated. They also teach students with physical disorders like multiple sclerosis, spinal bifida, cerebral palsy and those who have suffered strokes. Sensory integration disorders are also welcome and this includes both attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and attention deficit disorder (ADD). These are just a few of the many types of students who attend Pal-O-Mine and the activities offered are not limited to people with these specific disorders.

Scope of Activities: At Pal-O-Mine the activities performed are as numerous as the volunteers who serve there. Most recently, they brought in an organic gardening and recycling program to help teach children responsibility. They have vocational training and also have some technology training to help the students to learn the basics about computers. At Pal-O-Mine, they also offer Equine Assisted Psychotherapy, which focuses on people suffering from grief, trauma, eating disorders, substance abuse, addiction and co-dependency. The sessions can be taken in individual or group form to cater to the special needs of each individual. Pal-O-Mine's specialty lies in their expertise in treating disabled people with the magic of riding horses. Through the process of riding horses, their students build both their muscles and their confidence while learning balance and coordination. The volunteers work to help assist students who need additional help riding, and at the same time are helping to further build their social skills. They say at Pal-O-Mine, "We can turn a disability in to a riding ability."

Volunteer Involvement: Pal-O-Mine currently boasts close to one hundred and fifty volunteers. Volunteers have the freedom to come whenever they please; some come once a month while others come once a week. The volunteers must be at least sixteen years of age, and the founder kindly asks that they stay at least three hours per volunteering shift. Some of the responsibilities of the volunteers include taking care of the horses, gardening, various computer activities, and helping students in many ways including teaching them to ride or helping them to learn a specific job. From the entire staff at Pal-O-Mine, there are only three paid employees; understandably, the success of their mission is dependent upon the continuing dedication of their generous volunteers. One of the most surprising facts about Pal-O-Mine is that 90% of the volunteers have stayed with the organization since they moved to their new location in Islandia. Volunteers helped enormously during the move when they donated money and helped build the facility on the 8-acres of land. This dedication is true testament to the amazing commitment of the volunteers. These are the people that make Pal-O-Mine such a wonderful organization. It has even been stated that some of the volunteers have been with the organization for upwards of ten years.

Future Ideas: At Pal-O-Mine Equestrian, they hope to expand the population they serve by helping the veterans who have fought for our country. The director's dream is to have a residential area to house their students in, so they could have a longer and more extensive stay at Pal-O-Mine. They are currently building an indoor riding facility so that the riding programs can continue in the winter and on bad weather days. They are also planning on building an administrative building for the workers.

Public Recognition: Lisa Gatti has been on all of the local news channels like News 12, and has even been featured on The Today Show. Lisa was chosen to be the United States Equestrian team leader in the 1996 and 2000 Paralympics games. Lisa has been on the CBS Early Show and received an American Hero award from them while on air. She was named one of the top 40 rising stars under 40 by Long Island Business News. She was also named one of the top 50 businesswomen on Long Island.

Funding Sources: Of all of the riders at Pal-O-Mine, 30% come from economically-troubled families. To help them afford the lessons, the students are sponsored. Many of these sponsors are from Long Island. The whole facility was built on government grants and donations from various people and companies. Some of the buildings at Pal-O-Mine were donated, like their indoor riding facility. Fundraisers are a big part of how the company raises money. They have many outings throughout the year in order to raise money. In April, they hold an Easter egg hunt to raise money and they also have an annual golf outing set at Timber Point Country Club. However, their biggest fundraiser takes place at Belmont Stakes Racetrack, and is called "Day at the Races." This event was started by two of the parents whose children take lessons at Pal-O-Mine. Over a hundred people attended the fundraiser and it helps to maintain the organization.

Contact Information:

Pal-O-Mine
829 Old Nichols Road
Islandia, NY 1174
Office: (631) 348-1389
Fax: (631) 348-1451
Web site- WWW.Pal-O-Mine.org
E-mail info@pal-o-mine.org

**Submitted by:
Robert Morrison
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