



2020 Year-end
Newsletter



Photo courtesy of Alice Sakamoto

Riding Out the Pandemic

With the closure of Westwind Community Barn to the public in March, the first problem Westwind Riding Institute (WRI) leadership had to solve was how to continue providing care for the six horses and ponies regularly tended by our volunteers. To comply with the Shelter-in-Place Order, we reduced the number of volunteers by half. A team of five worked double shifts so that our program's essential workers—the horses and ponies—suffered no change in their care and feeding. Several more volunteers were brought back as Santa Clara County began to relax its restrictions, providing welcome relief to the skeleton crew that had been doing more than their usual share of heavy lifting.

As summer approached and restrictions were lifted in Santa Clara County, President Nancy Couperus and Monday lesson coordinator Hanna Merk came up with a creative plan that would allow us to safely offer a limited summer session. To minimize the number of side-walkers, family members were recruited and trained



to fill that role. The Merk family pod (all experienced WRI volunteers) generously offered to groom, saddle, and lead the horses/ponies, thereby minimizing risk of exposure for riders and their families. Vigilant mask and hand-sanitizing procedures were observed by all.

Roxanne Raksnys, our instructor for the past 5 years, returned to teach the July session, with her extensive equine therapy experience and signature sense of humor. Because of this creative and dedicated team, WRI was able to conduct its summer session for four very happy riders. One additional challenge during that session was that there were only enough vetted leaders and side-

walkers to use three therapy horses. So, two riders had to share, each riding for half the hour. Fortunately, as twin sisters, sharing was nothing new to them!

When fall arrived and county regulations allowed, WRI offered a Thursday riding session. (Our Monday session is on hold for now.) The good news is that a few more volunteers have been able to return, which allowed the use of four horses. The patient twins no longer had to share. Beginning in September, four happy children were back in the saddle, riding out the pandemic with their family, familiar volunteers, and dedicated instructor Roxanne.



2020: A Long and Winding Road

Unprecedented challenges were faced by everyone this past year—and Westwind Riding Institute (WRI) was no exception. But if you know the history of the organization, you know that its founders and volunteers have faced and overcome obstacles from the start, including to name a few: saving the Westwind barn, establishing the riding program from scratch, fundraising for 42 years, and building our 4-H barn. So, when Westwind Community Barn was closed to the public due to COVID-19, our fearless leaders and volunteers rose to the occasion.

Thank you for your continued support as we prepare to meet the needs of our riders in what promises to be an equally challenging 2021!



Unlike previous years, both riders and volunteers were all REQUIRED to wear masks for our Halloween ride.

Instructor Roxanne wears a rainbow unicorn "onesie" as she helps costumed riders mount for this year's Halloween trail ride.





You can see that Cara Mia—like every great teacher—has a lively sense of humor!

Welcome Cara Mia!

Foaled: 1992
Breed: Arabian
Color/Sex, Height, Weight:
Bay/Mare, ~650 lbs.
Joined Westwind 4-H: Summer 2020

Cara Mia may be new to our riding program, but she has been at Westwind Barn for more than 10 years. Originally trained for barrel racing, she belonged to a local family who enjoyed riding her on trails. According to Hanna Merk, who knew her then, “I have vivid memories of Cara Mia galloping... she was beautiful, strong, fast and happy.” Eventually the Merk family acquired Cara Mia. Both Hanna and her daughter Lina—WRI volunteers central to the success of our current program—took lessons on her from Victoria Dye Equestrian (VDE). At that time they taught her to jump and meet the needs of an English-saddled

rider. Eventually, Cara Mia became a part of the VDE lesson program. For more than 5 years her gentle disposition made it possible for many young beginners to learn to ride. Now retired from the VDE team, she continues to teach in our program, winning the hearts of everyone she meets.



Once again, dedicated supporters from the Clipped Wings SFO Peninsula organization provided a table loaded with Halloween treats for everyone.

Tango 1989–2020



At 31 years of age, Tango was the most mature horse on the WRI team and often the lead mare of the Byrne Preserve herd. She was also the horse who had been in our program the longest, joining in the year 2000. Before Westwind, Tango—a registered quarter horse—lived on a working ranch where she was an accomplished cutting horse. She also delivered two foals. A mare of gentle temperament, she carried our riders safely and sweetly for nearly 20 years.

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“Tango was a brave and independent horse. She would often be seen leading a trail ride along the Los Altos Hills trails.” — Deborah

“Our riders loved Tango’s sweet personality, and responsiveness to word commands. Her riders would giggle with joy when it was time to ‘trot on’ or cheer with delight during the ‘Red Light, Green Light’ game. We’ll miss our dear girl.” — Jan



SPECIAL THANKS

We'd like to extend special heartfelt thanks to Hanna Merk this year for her help brainstorming how to safely offer classes during the pandemic. With her creative energy, and the generous commitment and participation of her entire family—her daughters, Katarina and Lina; and her husband, Axel—it was possible to ensure that we had a safe pod of horse handlers for our summer session.

We are hugely grateful.

Thank You for Your Support

The Westwind Riding Institute (WRI) and Westwind 4-H Riding for the Handicapped Program would like to thank the following **foundations, organizations** and **companies** for their charitable contributions.

Children's Center, United Methodist Church of Los Altos
Clipped Wings SFO Peninsula
Flora Family Foundation
Hills 2000—Friends of the Hills
Kiwanis Club of Los Altos
Kiwanis Club of Mountain View
Los Altos Rotary Club
Los Altos Community Foundation
Menlo Park Live Oak Lions Club
Northwood Design Partners, Inc
PARC, a Xerox Company
Silicon Valley Association of Realtors (SILVAR)
Symantec
The Chou Family
The Kaplan Family
The LaPlanche Family
VMware

Westwind 4-H Riding for the Handicapped Program would like to acknowledge the significant role played by the **Town of Los Altos Hills**, both in our founding and our continued operation over the years. Without the Town's continued support both materially and otherwise, this program would not be possible. We'd also like to thank the following: **Victoria Dye Equestrian** for equine and volunteer resources in our programs; as well as the many **individual donors** who have contributed so generously over the years.



2021 Winter Class Schedule

Make a Donation

Westwind 4-H is self-funding, so your assistance, no matter how large or small, is welcomed to sustain our program. There are several ways to contribute: check, stock, employer matching, eScript, and PayPal. Consider making your next purchase through **AmazonSmile** and Amazon will make a donation to the **Westwind Riding Institute** – at no cost to you.



Please make checks payable to:

Westwind Riding Institute

Mail To: WRI—C/O Westwind Barn
27210 Altamont Road
Los Altos Hills, CA 94022

Westwind 4-H/WRI is a non-profit charitable organization, exempt under Internal Revenue Code 501(c)(3), which is solely supported by tax-deductible gifts and donations from interested individuals, clubs, and organizations.



Thursdays 4:00 – 5:00 pm
January 14, 21, 28
February 4, 11, 18, 25
March 4, 11, 18

Due to COVID-19, we are currently operating the riding program on a very limited basis to comply with Santa Clara County regulations. We hope that we will be able to welcome new and returning riders and volunteers for the Spring or Summer sessions. Please check our website for updates!

If you are interested in volunteering or enrolling your child as a rider, call (650) 947-8680 and leave a message.

Westwind 4-H Newsletter is published by Westwind 4-H. Its purpose is to inform friends and supporters about Westwind 4-H activities and events. The University of California, in accordance with applicable Federal and State Law and University policy does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, national origin, sex, mental or physical handicap, or age in any of its programs or activities.

Our newsletter was produced by volunteers: Jan Davis, Suzanne Doyle, Nancy Couperus, and Anitra DeMoney. Photos by Jitze Couperus and Alice Sakamoto.

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