

Therapy horses serve as metaphors

HORSES, from 1D

"The idea of using horses to help people heal has been around for hundreds of years," said Lynn Thomas, co-founder and executive director of EAGALA. "To use it in a focused way for mental health treatments is a little newer. We're providing psychotherapy. The horse is just an additional tool."

Or as Wise put it: "You take a traditional model of psychotherapy and embed a horse."

Horse history

Psychotherapists Adele von Rust McCormick and Marlena Deborah McCormick of Texas are considered the pioneers of equine therapy, developing their method decades ago. Their approach grew out of their clinical experience and expertise in the equestrian arts. The McCormicks have been breeding Peruvian horses, the 15th century steed of Spanish conquistadors, for more than 30 years and also train and show them.

Years ago, the McCormicks witnessed how healing horses could be and added the dimension to their successful practice with adult and adolescent psychiatric patients, the McCormicks said in an e-mail interview. Their books "Horse Sense and the Human Heart: What Horses Can Teach Us About Trust, Bonding, Creativity and Spirituality" and "Horses and the Mystical Path: The Celtic Way of Expanding the Human Soul" explore that journey.

"We believed that exposure to nature, via the 'real' world of horses could help restore inner balance and a sense of aliveness," they said. "It worked. Entering into a relationship with a horse is not only a joyful and empowering experience but it is challenging. In time, we discovered that horses could benefit all human beings who desire psychological and spiritual advancement."

As equine therapy gained public recognition, many mental health therapists began using it, they said, adding that unfortunately, many of them are not equestrians and horses can become depressed and demoralized with the burden of having to fix people's problems. The McCormicks have their own model and train their own apprentices to be students of human nature and of the horse.

The horse is captivating because it is an animal with powerful instincts, which can elevate people's own instincts.

"Unlike dogs and cats, horses are herd animals and so are human beings," they said. "We love dogs and cats, but they cannot school the human mind and heart in the way a horse can."

The animals work well for therapy because they are great at reading nonverbal communication, said Thomas of EAGALA. The horse picks up on every nonverbal message a person sends. So a counselor can observe how a horse responds to a patient and ask questions and devise exercises based on that.

"Horses are an amazing mirror," Pollock said. "When people are out with them, they build an awareness



Bonding. Chris Hamrick of Palm Bay makes friends with La Nina at Forever Florida in St. Cloud. La Nina lost her rear leg after it became tangled in barbed wire. Hamrick lost part of his left leg during the first Gulf War.



Photo courtesy of Holly Pollock

"Horses are an amazing mirror (of people). When people are out with them, they build an awareness of themselves that they would have never had."

Holly Pollock, owner, Epona Rivers

Equine therapies

Epona Rivers, an equine-facilitated learning and yoga center, is at Kingswood Stables, 2165 Glatter Road, Malabar. For more information, call 321-543-3809 or visit www.eponarivers.com.

Eye Of A Horse offers equine-assisted psychotherapy/learning at The Equine Education Center at Forever Florida, 4755 N. Kenansville Road, St. Cloud. For more information, call psychologist Sandra Wise at 321-749-0216 or visit www.EyeOfAhorse.com.

of themselves that they would have never had. The horses either mirror someone in their life or they're mirroring an emotion or a pattern of behavior that has kept this person stuck or paralyzed from moving forward in their life towards something they really want."

How it works

Equine-assisted psychotherapy and learning are not about mounting and riding into the sunset though, NAHRA sometimes includes riding as part of treatment.

Rather, the horse serves as a metaphor, in addition to being a catalyst to bring up issues, Wise said. She said many times, talking about something in a sterile therapy room makes it hard to get to the real issue.

"The magic word here is experiential learning, so experiencing something," Wise said. "If you are a person who has some social problems, relationship problems, if you were to approach the horse and he was to turn around and walk away, that's very impacting. The person would feel something at that mo-

ment that could relate to what happens in their relationships."

In that situation, Wise and an equine specialist would encourage the person to approach the horse in a different way. Could the person change something so the horse behaves in a different manner?

"So we might coach that person, on his own, to discover changes he can make in himself that will help him get to where he wants to in life in terms of having more satisfying relationships."

Wise said equine-assisted psychotherapy can be used for most issues that psychologists address in traditional psychotherapy in an office, whether it's depression, bereavement or anxiety. She said with more severe mental illness, psychotherapists need to use sound clinical judgment when choosing treatment options.

Some counselors use EAP as a supplement to talk therapy; others use it in place of it. Insurance coverage varies; the cost is similar to a therapy session.

No two EAP sessions are the same. Sometimes patients direct what happens.

Curtis Arnett, 40, of West Melbourne, who was left a paraplegic in 2005 after a motorcycle accident, wheeled his chair into a pen of horses, selected one that he liked and then led him into a separate area. There, he worked on a relationship with the horse — making requests, building trust and establishing boundaries by asking Mud Dog to repeatedly retrieve a soda bottle.

He tried to lead Mud Dog back into the pen when the session was over, but all the horses came into the area and surrounded him, making him feel stuck. A military veteran, it brought up issues of what it was like to have to leave his family to go into combat. When his wife would drop him off, she wouldn't want to leave.

Arnett, a psychology student at

Florida Tech, was at Forever Florida to get a feel for what it would be like to go through an actual EAP session.

In the arena, you have real-time experience and nonjudgmental interaction between a patient and the horse, said StarrLee Heady of PX Equine Enterprises Inc. in Green Cove Springs. "You don't worry so much about what the horse thinks," she said.

That is useful for an eating disorder patient, said Sari Shepphird, a clinical psychologist and eating disorders specialist in West Los Angeles, who sometimes refers patients to EAP.

She said the therapy eases patients into trusting relationships. A substantial percentage comes from tumultuous backgrounds.

"Equine therapy is again a nice way to show, 'you can be good enough. You can be good enough to have a relationship with another being, who is not going to comment on what you weigh, who is going to respond to your unique gifts of talent and personality.'"

Learning about yourself

The work does not always deal with mental health issues. For example, Eye Of A Horse provides equine-assisted learning to sports teams that want to learn how to communicate better and use nonverbal cues with teammates. Some people want to learn more about themselves; how assertive are they, how much influence do they have, how good are they at setting boundaries?

Horses can help. Pollock of Epona Rivers describes the learning process as a method of distinguishing the feelings you create by the thoughts in your head from authentic emotion.

"This whole program, this whole methodology is about processing your life, and your experiences in your life, and your relationships in your life to create a positive frame

of mind and to activate the positive mind," she said.

Eight teens from the Bright Star Center for Grieving Children and Families, part of Hospice of Health First, came away from a weeklong day program at Epona Rivers last summer knowing how to set boundaries. Horses, like people, will invade your space.

They also learned to pay attention to their environment, quiet their minds and cope with some hard emotions.

"You could just see them relax," said Cynthia Koppler, who runs the program. "The boundary work was so important. Being able to set boundaries and say, 'This is what I do and don't want for myself, and it's OK. I have the right to set that boundary.' You have a right to say no to people."

As for EAP, the future looks bright. Researchers have been studying the effects of equine-assisted psychotherapy for more than 10 years. Although some studies are more scientific than others, there is credible research on EAP in peer-reviewed publications, Wise said. With even more supportive research conducted in 2009 and 2010, she is inviting graduate students from Florida Tech and University of Central Florida to get involved at The Equine Education Center at Forever Florida.

Hamrick said he would love to continue with EAP.

"I was really impressed with the horse. I think I fell in love with it," he said. "You got a horse, a big animal I'm amazed by. I think I'd like to interact with the horse more. Kind of like we understood each other a little bit — instinctive wise. I think maybe some positive things can come for maybe the horse and me both." ■

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Royal-crazy Yanks in London for reality show

BY JILL LAWLESS
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LONDON — You may be interested in the royal wedding. Enthusiastic even.

But you probably are not as excited as Allison Lackey, a 24-year-old from Chicago who happily admits to spending too much time contemplating Prince William and Kate Middleton's nuptials.

"I've been thinking a lot about the logistics," Lackey says.

That's the logistics of her own day on April 29, not the challenge of marshaling 2,000 guests, tens of thousands of well-wishers and a vast global television audience to view the royal wedding at London's Westminster Abbey.

"I'm going to get home from work, literally go straight to bed, get up at midnight, make some tea and start watching the coverage," Lackey said. Later, there will be high tea at Chicago's storied Drake Hotel. "It's going to be a big 24 hours."

Lackey is royally obsessed. The corporate communications manager wears a replica of Princess Diana's wedding ring her boyfriend gave her for Christmas and is throwing a bachelorette party in honor of Middleton, the soon-to-be British princess. (Needless to say, Middleton won't be attending.)

Who better than Lackey to be a contestant on "Royally Mad," a BBC reality show that brings five crown-crazy Americans to London on a



BBC

Royal jewels. Holly Passalacqua from the "Royally Mad" TV show visits Garrard, the Royal Jewelers, in London. The BBC program aims to tap the vast American appetite for royal wedding coverage.

tour of sites replete with royal history?

Contestants also pit their royal wits against one another to compete for a "mystery grand prize" — which is not, alas, an invitation to the Westminster Abbey ceremony.

The show, which airs in two parts on Tuesday and April 19 on BBC America, follows the five Americans as they visit Westminster Abbey, get a polo lesson from William's instructor, try on hats at the Philip Treacy boutique and spend an evening at Mahiki, a nightclub favored by the young royals. There also is a makeover from Middleton's stylist and a tour of Kensington Palace

with a friend of the late Princess Diana.

The contestants — four women and one man — come across as likable, frighteningly knowledgeable about the monarchy and unabashedly crazy about all things royal.

"Their enthusiasm is completely infectious," said Cat Deeley, a British TV personality who hosts the show and is one of its executive producers.

"Royally Mad" is one of a slate of BBC programs aimed at tapping the vast American appetite for royal wedding coverage. The network also plans to show the BBC's domestic coverage of the ceremony commercial-free on its American channel.

Deeley, who presents TV shows in her native England and in the U.S. — where she hosts "So You Think You Can Dance" — has been mulling over why so many Americans are so very interested in the British royal family.

"I think it's because they just don't have one themselves," Deeley said.

"On both sides of the Atlantic, we're brought up with fairy stories and princes and princesses and living happily ever after. The closest thing they have is the first lady and the president, and I don't think there has been anybody in the glamour stakes since the Kennedys," she said.

For Lackey and fellow contestant Holly Passalacqua, royal mania was forged in childhood, nurtured by mothers who passed on their love for the late Princess Diana, and memories of her fairytale wedding to Prince Charles in 1981.

Lackey said one of her earliest memories is royal-related.

"I was a flower girl for my aunt's wedding," she said. "I'd never been to a wedding before, I didn't know what to expect. My mom was trying to put it into perspective for me and she said, 'Let me show you my own favorite wedding'" — and produced a video of Charles and Diana's ceremony.

"That was my first introduction to the pomp and circumstance and the delight that happens at those big royal occasions." ■

Clifford: Big Wheels are a big nuisance?

CLIFFORD, from 1D

led to a lawsuit. The Persimmons Place board is consulting an attorney and could vote on the rules April 27.

The parents of Persimmon Place, however, aren't taking the play ban sitting down inside with their kids.

"This is just a bunch of old ladies on a power trip," Angela Hatten told the *Daytona Beach News-Journal*.

And Lenore Skenazy, sometimes called "America's Worst Mom" because she let her 9-year-old ride the New York subway alone in 2008, has taken up the cause, posting this manifesto on her Free-Range Kids blog:

"The point is: Kids deserve to play outside. It doesn't even seem like it should be legal to ban this, anymore than banning eat-

ing or sleeping. But of course, it's all about 'safety,' the word that sneaks into so many debates, legitimately or not, and often stuns all common sense. I hope the kids storm this meeting in their roller skates. It is time for a revolution."

I'd be more inclined to believe the board members had merely children's safety — and not a cranky anti-kid agenda — in mind if they hadn't included the provisions against noisy play.

Because I remember just how annoying the sound of a herd of Big Wheels barreling down the sidewalk can be.

And how much my kids loved to ride them. ■

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Arthur (PG-13)	10:15 AM	12:35 PM	2:55 PM	5:00 PM	7:25 PM	9:55 PM
Fiona (PG-13)	10:20 AM	12:35 PM	2:55 PM	5:15 PM	7:30 PM	9:50 PM
Your Highness (R)	10:20 AM	12:30 PM	3:00 PM	5:10 PM	7:20 PM	9:40 PM
Step (PG)	10:20 AM	12:30 PM	2:40 PM	5:00 PM	7:00 PM	9:10 PM
Limitless (PG-13)	10:25 AM	12:35 PM	3:05 PM	5:15 PM	7:25 PM	9:45 PM
Source Code (PG-13)	10:15 AM	12:15 PM	2:15 PM	4:15 PM	6:15 PM	8:15 PM
The 5th Quarter (PG-13)	10:25 AM	12:45 PM	2:50 PM	5:05 PM	7:15 PM	9:20 PM
Clay of A Wimpy Kid 2 (PG)	10:25 AM	12:40 PM	2:45 PM	4:55 PM	7:10 PM	9:15 PM
Limitless (PG-13)	10:40 AM	1:00 PM	3:10 PM	5:20 PM	7:35 PM	10:05 PM
Lincoln Lawyer (R)	7:30 PM	9:55 PM				
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