

Alberta Donkey and Mule News, December, 2008

“Rudy”

Contributed by Linda Leggette

Mount View Special Riding Association is a non-profit organization that improves the quality of life for children and adults living with physical and cognitive disabilities through therapeutic riding programs. We hold our spring and fall sessions in Olds at the Ag Society facilities there.

I have been volunteering with the group for eight years. I have been bringing volunteer horses for all of those years, as well as helping with the grooming, tacking up, side-walking and leading duties.

Three or four years ago we had a idea to build a cart that would accommodate a wheelchair for those riders who absolutely could no longer sit on a horse, even with help. The cart was designed by a gentleman named Lorne Sharkey from Eagle Hill, and purchased by the Bowden Light Horse Club, of which I am a member. The Light Horse club then donated the cart to the therapeutic riding program.

My old horse, Joe, pulled the cart for the first year. After four hours of pulling the cart, which weighs a fair amount when loaded, Joe was one very tired horse. He is 25 years old at the time, and I didn't want to ask him to do it again. I decided that we needed some 'mule power'. The animal pulling this cart must be absolutely trustworthy, as these children and adults are helpless in their wheelchairs, and the wheelchairs are strapped fast to the cart. I knew that my wonderful friend, Rudy, would be a good prospect for the job.

I didn't know how perfect! From day one Rudy took to the job at hand like he'd been born for it. It was like he'd been doing it for years. He has no problem hauling the cart around for the entire four hours, and is quiet, reliable and loves the kids. He stands quietly while they pet his nose or rub his ears.

Two years ago one of the riders really wanted to learn to drive, so we tied a kitchen chair to the cart, and proceeded to teach her to drive my mule. At the season-end show Rudy and Christine did a wonderful driving demonstration with pylons, and I stood there with tears in my eyes, watching my mule do something very, very special - the performance of his life! A couple of the special riders got to ride him this past two years, and even do a trail course on him.

For this fall session 2008 Rudy is doing his usual duties as cart mule, and also is saddle mule to a very pleased young lady. She has graduated to riding Rudy "lead-line free", and they're getting along very well.

He has surprised many people who come out to volunteer and to watch... they just didn't know that a mule could do all the things that they've seen horses do, and do them so well. Some have never even seen a mule ridden. Rudy is doing something incredibly wonderful with, and for, these special people, and I couldn't be prouder.

"Thank you Linda for writing about Rudy. With the season of giving, fast approaching, what better gift than to share your wonderful mule in such a worthy way. It's a great Christmas Story! Let's remember the "reason for the season" and like Linda, spread our good will around to those less fortunate, including our four-legged friends who need extra attention during the winter months. Merry Muletidings! " Marlene Quiring



Rudy pulling the special handicapped cart.



Linda with her special mule Rudy.