

The inaugural ASHBA Learn To Ride Free program took place at Parker Valley Farm with all the available slots quickly filled.



LEARN TO RIDE FOR FREE

ASHBA Launches New Promotional Program

PHOTOS COURTESY OF VINCE LEMASTER



Tom (far left) and Jamie Volz (3rd from right, front row) opened the doors to their Parker, Colorado, facility and had an army of volunteers to make it a successful day.



Young people enjoyed several different hands on experiences with the American Saddlebred.



As part of the media coverage surrounding the program, Christina Spiliotis was featured on a television segment of Good Day Colorado.

Funded through a grant from USA Equestrian Trust, this July, ASHBA launched an innovative new program designed to infuse American Saddlebred riding programs with new beginners and their families who want to learn to ride.

On Saturday, July 9, the American Saddlebred Horse and Breeders Association (ASHBA), in cooperation with Parker Valley Farm in Parker, Colorado, hosted the first “Learn To Ride For Free” program. The event was a huge success. Registration was done online and limited to the first 30 riders (age 6 – 12) and attendance maxed out almost immediately.

In addition to a professionally supervised lesson, attendees received a tour of the facility, had an introduction to equipment, and hands on involvement in learning to lead horses and ponies, grooming, tacking up horses, and the parts of the horse.

“Learn to Ride’ has been under development for almost a year,” reported David Mount, ASHBA Executive Director/CEO. “Our goal is to increase awareness of the American Saddlebred and to welcome new riders and potential owners. Stacey Kipper-Perrelli, Co-Chair of the ASHBA Riding Program Council and President of the Colorado American Saddlebred Horse Association suggested doing the pilot program in her home state. Jamie and Tom Volz of Parker Valley Farm stepped up and offered their barn as our ‘beta’ test site. They were instrumental in making the event happen and run so well.”

Learn To Ride For Free was first proposed by Honorary Board Member Malissa Welke of Tulsa, Oklahoma. “My son Henry played travel hockey. Our family helped out in the “Try Hockey For Free” program sponsored by USA Hockey. We saw how well it worked on a local level. That program has been a very successful recruiting tool.

“Hockey and horseback riding are very similar. In terms of getting started, you need a designated area with the proper equipment. You need professional guidance. And of course, there is the question of expense, which can



Jamie Volz assisted a first-time rider aboard a magical American Saddlebred.



ASHBA's David Mount and Malissa Welke were on hand to take part in the launch of this important program.



Brianna Tolkacz presented the multi-titled gaited horse, CH Lucky You Lucky Me.

be an issue. Learn to Ride checks all the boxes, enabling kids and parents to find a barn and sample the experience without the expense."

Welke and Sam Geller of ASHBA oversaw advertising and publicity in advance of the Parker event. A TV station did a five-minute segment on Good Day Colorado. Mount and Welke both worked the event. Welke said they learned some important things moving forward.

"Once word got around, the spots filled up quickly," said Welke. "This is not only a unique way to publicize the American Saddlebred, but also a tremendous opportunity for the local barns to build riding programs. Jamie Volz is offering discounted future lessons for attendees and for those who didn't sign up in time. We've also made Vince LeMaster's wonderful photos available at no charge."

Mount was impressed by the well-organized support from Parker Valley Farm. "The staff there was complemented by over 20 volunteers made up of riders and their families, in particular the Spiliotis family who dedicated hours of work, support and special cookies with farm and ASHBA logos. They also supplied an endless source of water from Liquid Death mineral water the entire day."

Their daughter, Christina Spiliotis, was featured on the Good Day Colorado televised segment.

ASHBA will take the knowledge it has gained from this first event as it looks to rapidly expand the program across the country. "We've already had several barns contact us about hosting a Learn to Ride event at their facility," noted ASHBA Marketing and Communications Manager, Sam Geller. "We've learned a lot about how to make the day a seamless, positive experience."

Learn To Ride For Free is an amazing opportunity to expose young riders to the American Saddlebred and get them on a horse. The day was filled with extraordinary moments and lots of smiles from children and their families because Parker Valley Farm and ASHBA introduced 30 new children to horses and helped them LEARN TO RIDE.

