



Mackinac, horses and kids – a magical combination.

Dear Friends, MHA Members and 4-H Supporters,

In 1998 I became a 4-H leader and formed the Mackinac 4-H Horse Clubs with our local horsey kids. I had been borrowing saddle horses from the rental stables to give lessons after hours, which, of course was not ideal – tired horses. A new plan emerged when I asked Mr. Shufelt for the use of his empty stable. I formed the Mackinac Horsemen's Association (MHA) for the sole purpose of providing lesson horses through the Lease-A-Horse and Share-A-Lease programs. For the past 12 years I have been proud to have been able to maintain this wonderful program with the help of MHA members, many supporters, countless volunteers and the MHA Boards, past and present.

The current program has its challenges, the most important being safety. Safety has been an issue from day one, and I am pleased to report our record is exemplary due to careful planning and diligence. The process of getting the horses and kids up to and back from Great Turtle Park (GTP) for lessons from the Mission Hill Stable location with the steep hill and all of the traffic, safely, is a logistical challenge. Consequently, the more experienced riders have been asked to clean, tack up and ride up to GTP, take their lesson and then wait until the other riders have had their lessons before returning back to the stable to untack and clean their horses before being finished. Although not a safety issue, another drawback is that those novice riders, who do not get to the stable, miss out on the experience gained by the interaction at the stable. There is also the issue of horses getting loose at our current location, either by breaking a halter, charging an open gate or pulling away from one of the kids leading them. In a high traffic residential area a loose horse could cause serious problems. The solution is a location where the lesson horses and the kids are all at the same location in a contained area. As the 4-H Leader and riding instructor for the past 12 years I have always escorted the riders to and from the stable to lessons at GTP, including when we have visiting clinicians and instructors. I do not feel I could confidently pass this responsibility on to anyone else. The Community Stable would provide a safety net, so to speak, for the inexperienced riders to develop their stable and riding skills before earning the privilege to go to and from GTP for lessons safely, would allow new instructors to confidently evaluate each rider's abilities before allowing them to venture outside the perimeter fence (already in place) and would eliminate some of the concerns about a loose horse.

Space is the next issue. I am, as is MHA, forever grateful to John Shufelt and the Chambers and Benser families for their donation of the use of the Mission Hill location. But to grow and prosper for the next generation, we need more room, room for more horses and room for the tack and equipment that go along with them, which is essential to the future of this program. At the current location we have outgrown the tack room, feed storage and turn-out space. I have always strongly believed that horses need space to roll, run and buck to be safe for lessons. Currently, we just do not have that kind of space for the number of horses we have. At this time, we only have stall space for 8 horses. Turn-out is limited and rotated twice a day to allow for all of the horses to get out and two horses stay out 24/7 on our gracious neighbor's property. At one time we had 12 horses available for lessons and were giving approx. 60 lessons per week. The new location has almost 3 acres, most of which will be turn out space for the horses, we already have a 100x200 arena in place for lessons and a fence surrounding the property.

Most importantly, MHA is an all volunteer non-profit organization made up of members who have families who live on the Island, either part time or full time, who have their own businesses, work here on the Island or elsewhere and who chose to donate and dedicate their time, money and energies year-round to promote our Island and our "Horse Culture," all to insure the sustainability and future of the 4-H lesson program. I will be forever grateful to them for their support, and I am proud to have them as MHA members. I would also like to recognize the Mackinac Island State Park Commission's vision for seeing the need of a Community Stable and for their continued support.

It is truly magical for me to watch our young 4-H members become self confident, capable riders and form a lifelong fellowship with horses. I want to pass this magic on to future generations by having a Community Stable facility where we can safely, professionally and conveniently educate, promote and preserve our Island's "Horse Culture." I am asking you to support the Community Stable project. In so doing, you will allow the Mackinac 4-H Horse Club program to continue now and into the future. Voice your support, ask questions, comment, but please don't think we can maintain this program or build a Community Stable without you.

Respectfully,

Leanne Brodeur

Exec. Dir., Mackinac Horsemen's Assoc.

Mackinac 4-H Horse Club Leader

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