



Palos Park *Life*

A SOCIAL MAGAZINE FOR THE RESIDENTS IN THE VILLAGE OF PALOS PARK

FEBRUARY 2020



Brooke Bender, Palos Park Resident, riding Tina, one of Holistic Riding Equestrian Therapy's smallest members of their equine herd, and her team of volunteers having fun and learning new skills during her lesson

Photo Left to Right: Onofrio Loconsole, Brooke Bender, Thad Ryniak, Kayla Stoub

Photo Credit: Holistic Riding Equestrian Therapy

young achiever

Photos and article submitted by the Holistic Riding Equestrian Therapy Team

MEET

Brooke Bender

PALOS PARK RESIDENT AND HOLISTIC RIDING EQUESTRIAN THERAPY (HRET) MEMBER



Onofrio Loconsole, Brooke Bender, Thad Ryniak, Kayla Stoub

They say it takes a village to raise a child – and in Brooke Bender’s case, one of her caregivers is a pony named Tina. This 2-and-a-half-year-old Palos Park resident has a dream team of therapists behind her to help navigate day-to-day life. Brooke made her entrance into this world at just 28 weeks with her twin brother, Colin, and spent the first 56 days of her life in the neonatal intensive care unit. Due to a brain bleed, Brooke’s fine motor skills were impacted and caused significant muscle tightness.

Like most little girls, Brooke loves ponies. Her pony, Tina, is more like a unicorn in her world and provides much more than nuzzles, nickers for treats, and a flowing mane to braid. Tina gives her the freedom to walk, develop social skills, and gain core strength as her small stature develops. Tina is one of the smallest members of the equine team at Holistic Riding Equestrian Therapy (HRET) in Lemont, Illinois. At just 42 inches tall, Tina’s small stature gives kids like Brooke a sense of security, love, and compassion – in addition to the many equine-assisted activities and therapy (EAAT) benefits. Just like Brooke, Tina, too, has a brother, and he adds to Brooke’s awesome team of therapists – four legs and all.

Brooke has been undergoing a variety of therapies to gain strength with each day. She attends physical, occupational, speech, and aquatic saltwater therapy weekly, and has added EAAT

to her schedule. Since starting therapeutic riding, Brooke’s core is stronger. She is able to sit taller and is much more vocal than when she first started with the program...all milestones she has been able to achieve with her pony companions. Brooke reaches for the reins with a huge smile on her face at each lesson and eagerly interacts with the team of volunteers at HRET.

After her first lesson, Brooke’s parents realized that HRET was the added link in Brooke’s development. “Our first two-and-a-half years as parents have been anything but ‘traditional,’ and our path has not been easy,” said Brooke’s mom, Melissa. HRET gives Brooke’s parents hope, and they are eager to see the new skills and friendships Brooke gains with each session. HRET has become a second home for the Bender family – being just one town over from their residence. The team of instructors and volunteers are passionately committed to empowering the lives of individuals with varied physical, emotional, cognitive, and social abilities through the spirit of the horse. “Our little girl would not get a chance at walking without facilities like HRET. We are incredibly thankful for individuals such as Marlene Karman, executive director of HRET, and the HRET volunteers,” stated Brooke’s mother.

HRET is a 501(c)3 that can only operate with the generous contributions of time from volunteers and funds from individuals and corporations. The combination of an incredible team of 250+ trained volunteers, instructors with a passion for helping others, and a barn full of loveable equines have made HRET a reputable staple in the Chicagoland community. HRET is growing and with that comes the need to build a larger home for their equine friends. The program is looking for donated labor, materials, and funds to complete their new ADA-compliant, climate-controlled arena and barn, so Brooke and the HRET team can ride in comfort year-round.

“Our participants derive an overwhelming sense of pride, enhanced self-esteem and confidence from knowing that their horses need them for care and exercise,” said Marlene. “The bond between the rider, volunteer, and horse is the heart of our HRET family.”



Visit the HRET website at www.holisticridingtherapy.org for testimonials and ways to help give back to the community through HRET.



Edris Hoover, Onofrio Loconsole, Brooke Bender, Thad Ryniak, Marlene Karman, Kathy Sanders



Onofrio Loconsole, Brooke Bender, Thad Ryniak

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