



Julie Riggs Photos

4 M's Farm - Castleton, NY

By Julie Riggs

If you've never ventured down Phillips Road beyond East Greenbush toward Castleton, you're in for a wonderful surprise. Not far from the town line of East Greenbush on Phillips Road lies twenty-five acres of beautiful farmland and woods which is home to the Garcia family and their 4 M's Horse Farm in Castleton. The 4 M's are for the Garcia family's first names, Mary, Mike, Michelle and Michael. On one of the coldest days on a bright and sunny morning, Mary Garcia took a little while out of her busy day of farm chores and her job as a bus driver for the East Greenbush Central School District to chat a bit about her family's horse farm. A busy woman indeed, Mary is always on the move and loving every minute of it. As we step into the paddock area for a closer look (not a usual access for the public) at some of the beautiful horses, their gentle nature is obvious, and so is Mary's patience and work with them. A well-known saying sums it up best, "The outside of a horse is good for the inside of a

4 M's Continued from page 1

can also include us in their flexible spending accounts, which does help with the cost to families." Garcia and her daughter wrote the original lesson program which has been used since that first year. Year round lessons are also offered, with summer months being the peak season.

Twenty horses occupy the various pastures and paddocks on the twenty-five acres with breeds including, Quarter, Morgan, Draft Cross, Grade Ponies and Shetland Ponies. Many of the horses were rescued by Garcia and she says that just by word of mouth she has many leads on horses but also has to be selective about the process of bringing in other horses to the established herd.

"The very first thing we teach is safety, everybody signs in and all first time students are assigned a helper," says Garcia. Helpers are usually previous students who are older teenagers who now work on the farm and have been through lessons and know how to handle the horses and are familiar with the farm's practices and safety. While most of the first time students are children from as young as five years old, she does report that a lot of adults who rode as kids have been calling and seeking lessons along with many first time adult students.

Some of the most important safety aspects according to Mary Garcia are:

1. Never leave stall door open, horses can run out very quickly.
2. Always put shovels and rakes away, so you and horses do not trip on them.
3. Never run in or out of the barn, so as not to scare horses.
4. Always put lead line on horses when walking them out of a stall to the field.
5. Never wrap leads around arm, so you do not get hurt by horse pulling on them.

Required for the Western Pleasure Riding lessons are helmets and boots with a heel. All of the grooming and saddling of horses and ponies are done by the students and the helpers, allowing plenty of opportunity for everybody to lend a hand. So that the horses are familiar with routine and as a safety measure, the farm encourages use of stall sets to mount the horses as opposed to mounting from the ground. This is espe-

cially important because many students are young children and the practice eliminates confusion for the horses and children alike.

Lessons start in the 100' X 200' outside riding arena where spotters are available to help. Beginners start with a lot of stop and go exercises and later progress to games on horseback such as Frisbee and basketball, incorporating Garcia's overall philosophy of having fun while learning. As the lessons progress and Garcia assesses student abilities, the wooded acres with clearly marked trails are used where more leisurely rides and scenery are taken in.

In between lesson sessions, Mary Garcia is busy with the show season from May through October and also attends an average of four Equestrian clinics a year in Massachusetts which she finds very rewarding and gives her the advantage of having current knowledge in the field. Proper care of the animals and students learning and having fun are of paramount importance to the 4 M's Farm.

In the barn, grains and medications are all carefully labeled and the tack room is organized into sections so there is no question as to where equipment is stored. Weekly and monthly schedules are posted in the barn's entrance with contact information provided, all in clear and large lettering. Visitors and workers can immediately see the attention to detail and safety within the barn.

Horses are hayed twice a day and grain fed once a day in winter. They need the extra nutrients from grain during the winter. Garcia reports that in winter, the horses go through an average of seven bales of hay a day. Treats from visitors are discouraged, as is entrance beyond the rails onto the paddock areas.

Many of 4 M's students have expressed interest in the care of the horses even when they're done with lessons. Garcia says the kids love every aspect of grooming and horse care and she does her best to encour-

age their wanting to help. The farm is also immersed in community programs such as Girl Scouts and 4 H. Specifically, Girl Scouts can earn badges for 'Horse Lover & Horseback Rider' at the riding facility. As a result of 4 M's has many volunteers from the community on the farm. The Garcias explain that they really haven't had to advertise for their lessons, boarding and leasing because of the strong reputation they have built over the years. 4 M's Farm is a well-respected business and farm within Castleton and the Greater Capital Region of upstate New York.

Many of 4 M's Farm students are repeat customers, and a few have even gone on to make a career out of training horses or some other form of horse husbandry. Garcia points out that a few of her students have gone on to SUNY Morrisville and

SUNY Cobleskill and one of her students is a trainer at the Saratoga, NY race track. "I have a passion for teaching the students. When they start out here not knowing anything about the horses, and then going on to shows and placing, that's very rewarding. Many of my past students are out in the world and they take time to stop by and keep in touch with us," says Garcia about why she is a horse farmer and trainer. She also adds that keeping moving, and doing the chores no matter what means that she's not just sitting around. "I really have met the best people from all over," she says.

For more information on 4 M's Farm visit them on the web at www.4mshfarm.net, call Mary Garcia at 518-477-5470 or email her at maryesj28@aol.com

4 M's Continued on page 4