

THE REGION

Ponies ride again in South Park paddock

By Ann Belser

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Mark Dissen, resplendent in black cowboy boots and jeans, mounted Cindy Lou Who and rode her around the small paddock in South Park.

Cindy Lou Who, 22, and Mark, 6, are no strangers. Mark's aunt, Mary Amoroso, owns the pony and he has ridden her before.

But on Saturday, Mark's grand-

mother paid \$1 so he could be the first customer to mount up on the day the pony rides officially returned to South Park.

Pony rides were a regular feature at South Park until 1990, when the previous operator was closed amid allegations of animal abuse.

But ponies were back in business on Saturday, with mounts provided by Horses Unlimited of Bethel Park, operated by Amoroso and her husband David.

Business, like the rides, was slow

and steady Saturday and again yesterday.

Ten minutes after the pony ring opened at noon Saturday, Shannon Sankey pulled into the parking lot with her father and grandmother. Shannon, 4, would have been the first to take a ride, but she was scared off once she saw that the ponies were bigger than she.

"It's too scary, I don't want to," she said.

Instead, she petted Cowboy Phil, one of the other ponies who was safely tied to a horse trailer, while Mark stepped onto the newly painted gold mounting box and, with help from Amoroso, climbed aboard Cindy.

Shannon watched as Mark, followed by his sister Laura, 9, rode the pony in a circle.

By 12:20, Shannon was in the saddle. She turned around and smiled at her dad as the pony walked away, with Amoroso at her side and David Amoroso in the lead.

"I want to go again," she yelled when she returned. Her father, Brian Sankey, handed over another \$1 and she was off again.

The regular \$2 cost for a ride was cut in half for the official opening day Saturday.

Mary Amoroso said one of the hardest parts of reopening the pony rides was finding the insurance. She said she called all around the country until she found a company in Virginia. In order to have her rides insured, Amoroso had to provide the ponies' ages, size and photos to the company.

Amoroso, who works during the week as a legal secretary, said she wants to keep the ride open on weekends until it gets too cold to operate.

"If it's warm enough on Christmas, we'll be here," she said.



Andy Starnes/Post-Gazette

Quintin Mozurak, 2, of Baldwin, takes a pony ride around the ring at South Park Saturday, with a hand from Mary Amoroso, who has reopened the pony ride concession.