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COWBOY VETERANS

HORSES FOR HEROES-NEW MEXICO, COWBOY UP! OFFERS THERAPEUTIC RIDING SERVICES TO COMBAT VETERANS WHO ARE LIVING WITH POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER, PHYSICAL INJURIES OR COMBAT TRAUMA.



WHEN A FRIEND WHO OPERATED A THERAPEUTIC RIDING CENTER SUGGESTED Rick Iannucci begin offering riding services to combat veterans, the retired U.S. Marshal and former Green Beret took up the challenge, and Horses For Heroes - New Mexico Cowboy Up! was born.

The 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation uses Isaiah 6:8 as a guideline and offers a unique horsemanship, wellness and skill-set restructuring program based near Santa Fe, New Mexico. The program and services are free to all post 9/11 veterans and active military. They offer special emphasis for veterans with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD is referred to as post traumatic spiritual dissonance at the ranch), physical injuries or those who have experienced combat trauma during their time serving in the military.

Iannucci is the executive director and an instructor at Horses For Heroes - New Mexico Cowboy Up! and his wife, Nancy De Santis, serves as director and lead instructor of the program.

Cowboy Up! Is funded by tax-deductible donations and is staffed by volunteers. The program is based on comradery instead of counseling, and many veterans become instructors to other veterans as they learn the ropes and horsemanship skills required for the different phases of the program. ▶

BY JENNIFER K. HANCOCK

ABOVE: Cowboy Up! is based on comradery instead of counseling, and many veterans become instructors to other veterans as they learn the ropes and horsemanship skills required for the different phases of the program. Photo by Nancy De Santis, Cowboy Up! Director.



Director and Lead Instructor Nancy De Santis leads a special Women Veteran Retreat that is also open to those who are active military/reserve.

De Santis describes Cowboy Up! as a skill-set restructuring program that uses the science of neuroplasticity. She credits the horses for being the special teachers in the process. "We believe that working with the horses is therapeutic in and of itself," De Santis says.

The veterans work with the program's herd of American Quarter Horse geldings, which make excellent partners. The participants are getting hands-on experience from the first day and progress to riding. They also participate in other ranch life activities such as working cattle and experience the camaraderie of the cowboy lifestyle.

The Cowboy Up! program is open to male and fe-

male veterans, but De Santis also leads a special Women Veteran Retreat that is open to all women who are veterans or are active military/reserves.

The program's website lists some of the benefits associated with working with horses such as learning to be present and live in the moment; attain inner peace and calm; build confidence; develop boundaries; move beyond fear; learn to trust; improve communication; increase energy and vitality; expand awareness; and coping with grief and loss.

The list of requirements to participate in the program can be found on the organization's website:

www.horsesforheroes.org. 

Fergus BY JEAN ABERNETHY

