

# Rotary help key in success of riding therapy farm

By KEITH CORCORAN

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BRIDGEWATER — They helped buy a custom-made saddle, sponsored three months worth of riding for a young girl and played a key role in getting a wheelchair ramp built.

The Bridgewater and Area Rotary Club assisted Patricia McGill's horseback riding therapy farm in Blockhouse in a few ways during the farm's first couple of years of operation.



Video available on southshorenw.ca

Ms McGill recently gave a progress update to a Rotary lunch meeting. She said 2008 was a great year but there's lots to do in 2009, including fixing stairs and floorboards in the barn.

"I still have huge projects to do there but ... they'll all get done," she told the lunch crowd.

The credit and appreciation was also extended to the dozen volunteers who regularly pitch in at her 10-acre farm on Highway 325 to make the riding experience more fun and safe.

"You can't do this kind of thing without lots of people helping," Ms McGill added.

The treatment is suited for people with special needs. The client list includes children with Down syndrome, autism and visual impairments. The therapy is said to offer benefits through the ranges of motion of the horse, concentration on riding and communication between instructor, horse and individual.

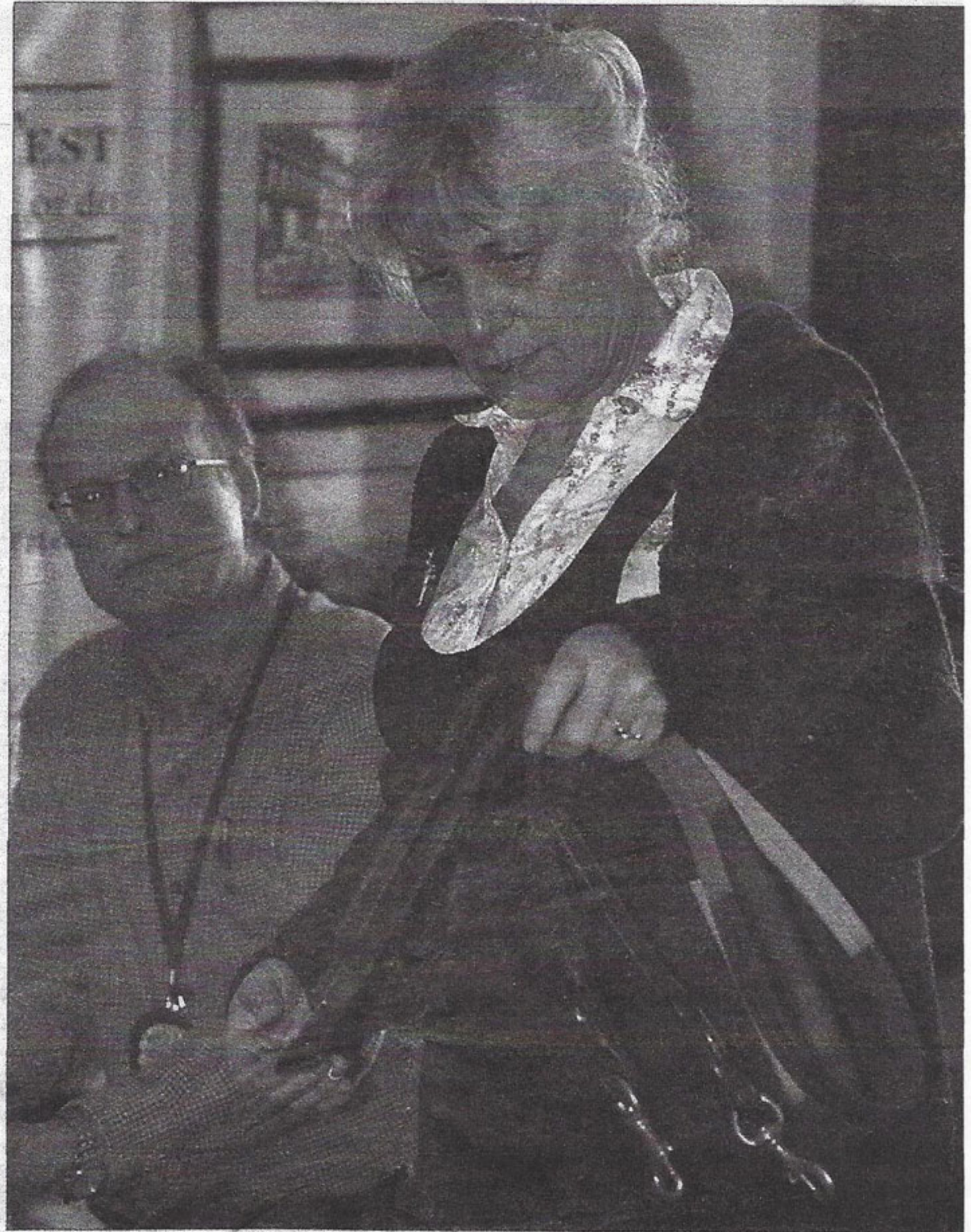
The therapeutic riding requires a doctor's referral and clients are required to have insurance. The cost is \$360 for an initial six-week-long session. The client is reassessed following the initial session. The first riding instruction is free.

"The riding fee pays for all of the horse's care," Ms McGill said.

The farm has three horses, including two Morgan breeds named Silverbell and Dandy who made the trek to Nova Scotia from Quebec where Ms McGill founded the therapeutic riding centre Lucky Harvest.

She said she used to see 60 kids a week in Quebec. She can handle up to 10 kids at a time in Blockhouse.

In Quebec, the centre depended on the financial aid of service clubs and gov-



KEITH CORCORAN PHOTO

Patricia McGill shows the Bridgewater and Area Rotary Club and member Barry Schnare, left, some of the gear from her Blockhouse farm. Ms McGill runs a therapeutic horseback riding program.

ernment. She expects the Blockhouse operation to eventually be in the black. "If it's meant to happen, it will happen."

It was more than \$3,000 in the red last year but much of what was spent was on things that are permanent.

She encourages others to start their own therapy clinics.

"The kids are not just getting on the horse and going for a ride," she later told this newspaper.

"They're brushing. They're putting on equipment. Anything they can do I get them to do. So, the lesson isn't really getting there and sitting on a horse for an hour. In many cases some kids couldn't possibly sit up straight on a horse for a whole hour. It would exhaust them."

She said she was fortunate to obtain the Blockhouse farm and "lucky that I've got all these people that just sort of said, 'Can I help?'"