

PROFILE: Rocky Hollow Ranch, Beaver Bank, Nova Scotia

By Sheryl Dubois

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At **Rocky Hollow Ranch**, people will find horses, dogs and a pony that would - **Rocky Hollow Ranch** a lifelong dream come true. Monday, April 9, 2018 - 12:01pm ...

Marylyn Andrews of Rocky Hollow Ranch surely believes that working at a horse ranch is, *a priori*, a therapeutic activity. Yes, there is money to be made and bills to be paid, but the activity, the being in the company of large animals (and small!), is simply, naturally, therapeutic. Andrews wants to share the warmth and experience with children and adults in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) community.

Andrews is especially keen to encourage children and adults with physical or mental challenges, who might otherwise not get to experience a ranch environment, to book a visit or attend an open-day event.

Rocky Hollow Ranch (RHR) is located on the north edge of Beaver Bank, in HRM. Eleven horses live at RHR, ten of them rescued by Andrews and one of them just renting a room. The ranch is part of a greater 200-acre forest owned by a very good neighbor who sold Andrews six acres for the Ranch.

Andrews didn't come to purchase the RHR without grit and perseverance as well as the backing from her husband, family, many friends and supporters. At 40 years old Andrews returned to school to complete grades 11 and 12. Within a few years she topped off her formal education with a degree from Dalhousie University, in recreational therapy.

Andrews said she wanted to do "something like the ranch" since she was a little girl; her mother dug out a childhood school project in which Andrews had written her wish that when she grew up, she "wanted to have a place where people of different abilities could go."

Andrews said that she has seen for herself the effect a ranch environment has on kids - kids who have anxiety issues, for example - when they come to the ranch. They enjoy the chores and are free to explore and enjoy their surroundings.

While there is a great deal that goes into maintaining the ranch comprised of the stable and yard, the multi-activity building as well as a home, the biggest challenge, said Andrews, is "keeping all the horses healthy."

And not just horses. Donkeys, chickens and dogs are also members of the ranch. But the horse care brings the highest price tag. Each of the ten horses require at least regular monthly visits by a veterinarian and then of course there are unexpected health issues, particularly with rescued horses who may present with more problems.

Andrews insists without the support from volunteers and the community at large – who want a space like this to exist in their community – the ranch would not be able to provide programming and events, and perhaps not rescue quite as many horses.

Organizations such as Canada Tire Jump Start, for example, finance children to go to RHR.

The ranch accommodates birthday parties, team building activities, a sugar shack in spring, day camps, after school visits and lots more.

Volunteers at Rocky Hollow Ranch include school-aged children and adults. In appreciation of their work in the barn – feeding, tacking up and exercising horses - volunteers are invited to learn to ride.

Andrews wants to build an indoor arena at the ranch, for “a lot of kids with challenges who can’t come outside as often,” she said.

For details call Marylyn at 902-266-3214 or visit Facebook @RockyHollowRanchHorsebackRiding.

