

Riding offers a different perspective on autumn

By Danielle Ray Correspondent

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PRINCETON — Fall in New England is an idyllic time of year, and visitors to Cornerstone Ranch on Dowds Lane have the opportunity to experience the gorgeous autumn foliage with a guided trail ride on horseback.

“The fall is a comfortable time of year,” Cornerstone Ranch owner Susan Connell said. “We enjoy the cooler temps, as do the horses. People coming to visit the ranch are in awe of the beauty. When it’s clear, we can see all the way to Boston from the adjacent land, which we purchased two years ago to preserve from being built on.”

The programs and such that Connell and her staff offer at the ranch extend throughout the entire year. Horseback riding lessons, trail rides, horse-drawn carriage rides, accelerated learn to ride workshops, summer riding programs and group outings are available, depending on the weather and season.

“Our trail rides stay busy through December because trail riding is such a nice way to get outdoors in all seasons, under normal conditions,” Connell said. “Horse-drawn rides will be in full swing very soon with the holidays approaching. We have many families who return every year for a ride. We love taking people on trail rides and horse-drawn rides.”

In addition, Connell’s daughter Julia Connell is in the process of becoming certified to work with Boy and Girl Scout groups that will be able to earn badges in horsemanship.

“The Girl and Boy Scouts of America have a great program, and we are excited to be a part of it,” Connell said.

Connell said Cornerstone is building up a clientele of groups who will visit the ranch for special outings, consisting of “people from all walks of life” — special needs, veterans, senior centers, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, and more. The group activities include trail riding, horse-drawn rides and refreshments, including lunch or dinner.

Accelerated Adult Learn to Ride Workshops are held periodically, the next one being on Oct. 20 and then again in April 2020. The workshops are a full day of riding and are at a faster pace than the leisure trail rides.

“Riders ride in the morning, break for a healthy lunch and discussion, and it’s back in the saddle again for the afternoon,” Connell said. “People love it, and my daughter Julia is on top of her game with the great instruction and group involvement. People have made lasting friendships, both human and equine, from our workshops.”

The horse-drawn wagon or sleigh rides are a popular option during colder months, and Connell said she is very excited to offer them to ranch visitors.

“People love our sleigh rides, and we try to include just the right amount of horse trivia and fun facts on the rides,” she said. “It’s fun to hang out by the campfire for hot chocolate and s’mores. It’s so gratifying to see people outside having great family times in the cooler weather.”

More than 20 horses and ponies who call the ranch home, and four licensed instructors are available to teach horseback riding lessons year round. Connell has five part-time employees and many volunteers who help her to run and maintain the 24-acre ranch.

“People helping at the ranch have been part of our extended family for 10-plus years,” Connell said. “Volunteers mostly help on the weekends and on Thursdays, which is ‘Volunteer Thursday’ every week. This is when we work on some projects and swap stories over a nice home cooked lunch at the ranch. It’s a fun day at the ranch working together.”

Connell said one extra horse is currently living at the ranch, and it belongs to staff member, Robyn Best, who often leads the guided trail rides.

“Robyn now rides her own horse on the trail rides,” Connell said. “It makes the job extra good because we form a bond with our horse, and then it’s like having one of your best friends along on the ride.”

For young horse enthusiasts, the ranch offers the chance to celebrate birthdays and other special events on site and include horse drawn rides, riding in the riding ring with instruction, birthday cake and ice cream, and gift bags. Groups can be anywhere from six to 50 people.

For more information, including booking a trail ride or group outing, visit cornerstoneranch.org or email reservations@CornerstoneRanch.org.