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BARN RAISINGS

A Newsletter for the Therapeutic Riding Community

SUMMER 2005

Published by Ruth Landsman, Architect and Seth Harry, AIA
Equestrian Facility Master Planning and Design

This is our fifth edition of Barn Raisings, a newsletter for the therapeutic riding community. This issue features the accomplishments of several of our current therapeutic riding projects, an article on the Mounting Area, co-authored by Anthony Busacca, Program Director of the J.F. Shea Center, and an item on equestrian facility design as part of university curriculums for equine studies.

It has been a busy year and one where we have seen the therapeutic riding facility become much more than a place where individuals with special needs partake in therapeutic riding services and hippotherapy services. The focus has broadened and many centers now want to offer other kinds of therapeutic services and networking opportunities.

FREEDOM RIDE TAKES NEXT STEPS

Freedom Ride, Inc. is planning to build a covered arena for their current facility at the Ben White Park in Orlando, Florida.

It will be the city of Orlando's first covered riding arena and will be a part of a complex that will include an administration and therapy complex, parking, covered walkways and a rider mounting area.

We are currently preparing the submission to the city of Orlando to get the necessary approvals. Freedom Ride, Inc., currently leases the city park for their riding program.

DESIGN PARAMETERS FOR A MOUNTING AREA

By Ruth Landsman, Registered Architect, and Anthony Busacca, Program Director, J.F. Shea Center in San Juan Capistrano, CA

One of the most critical areas in the design of a therapeutic riding facility is the "Mounting Area". Just as take-offs and landings are the most difficult maneuvers for an airplane flight, so are mounting and dismounting to the riding session. The following will discuss design considerations for the mounting area in a typical therapeutic riding facility.

The mounting area is defined here as the place where the client meets the horse before a mounted session begins and consists of a mounting ramp and platform, an assistant's block, and a connection to the riding arena. The mounting ramp is a device to get a rider with physical challenges up to the proper height for mounting on a horse with assistance from staff members. The assistant's block is positioned on the off side of the horse (right side) to enable staff to be at a height to better assist the rider into position.

Generally speaking, there can be upwards of 4-5 people in the mounting area, consisting of a horse leader, 2 side walkers, 1 instructor/therapist and the rider. In terms of design, this means one must have ample room to maneuver everyone involved, but controlled access for the rider and the horse. The rider is accompanied by a staff member, as a rule, to the mounting area, where they are fitted with a helmet, and then they proceed to the mounting ramp.

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NEWS ROUND-UP

Teaching Therapeutic Riding Facility Design

This spring, we were invited by Kelly Hall, an instructor at Ohio University Southern campus, to speak to the students enrolled in her course, Therapeutic Facility Design and Management, about our facility planning and design process. In addition to her class, many invited guests from local therapeutic riding programs attended. As her students represent likely future staff members and directors of therapeutic riding programs, we were very pleased that Kelly saw the need to educate them about the importance and value of properly planning and designing a purpose built facility for therapeutic riding.

Our presentation covered everything from overall site analysis, including zoning and permitting issues, to general parameters for organizing and placing the various building components typically comprising a therapeutic riding facility. By going through simple step-by-step explanations of each stage of the planning, funding, and implementation process necessary to successfully build a new, or dramatically improved, facility, the students were able to gain comprehensive insights into what is commonly viewed as a very daunting and complex endeavor. We hope that this will give them the confidence and ability to effectively engage in such initiatives at some point in their future careers, should the need to do so ever arise.

In closing we were asked to participate in an evaluation and critique of one of their student assignments — as part of their course work, they were asked to re-design an existing facility nearby to make it more suitable for use in the provision of therapeutic riding services. After the presentation we had the opportunity to answer the students questions and help evaluate their design responses. It was an enjoyable and educational experience for all of us.

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DESIGN PARAMETERS FOR A MOUNTING AREA

The general practice is to have the horse already in place and waiting before the rider goes up the ramp. If you wish to reduce the amount of time the horse must stand in the confinement of the ramp you can consider positioning the rider first. The comfort and security of both rider and horse should be weighed when determining the order of placement.

Once the rider is mounted on the horse, everyone accompanying the rider and horse needs to be able to move together in a straight line, at least initially, through a gate or opening into the arena. This describes the most common configuration, where the mounting ramp is on the left side of the horse with the assistant's block on the other side.

Another method is to have both the horse and assistant's block inside the arena (on the other side of the horse) with the mounting ramp outside the arena. In this scenario, there is a break in the arena fencing or wall, where a chain, rope or removable barrier is opened to allow the rider to get on the horse already waiting in the arena. The assistant's block is then a portable block that can be easily moved out of the way, once everyone is mounted and secured. If, for any reason the assistant's block, or any other part of the ramp cannot be removed from the working area of the arena it must be sectioned off with a clearly visible physical barrier to comply with NARHA standards. The barrier may consist of cones, poles, or similar items. The two choices described above for the mounting configurations is dependent upon how the facility is designed, such the direction the rider approaches the mounting area, how the horse enters the mounting area, and staffing needs and preferences.

Other design considerations include proximity and access of the mounting ramp to both the rider and the horse. Ideally the rider should not have to travel too far from where they enter the facility to the mounting area and the horse should be able to get to the mounting area in a direct approach from where they are groomed and tacked.

The ramp and platform design needs to take into account the slope of the ramp, the railings along the ramp portion and platform, materials for the ramp and platform, and height for the rider's platform. The design for the assistant's block must be the proper height with steps up and down and a railing on the opposite side of the mounting.

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THE HITCHING POST

√ ***Design Charrette for the Southern Delaware Therapeutic and Recreational Horseback Riding Program***

At the end of July, we held a planning and design

charrette in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware for the Southern Delaware Therapeutic and Recreational Horseback Riding (SDTRHR) program. SDTRHR is planning to build a new facility for their existing program at a new site in the Rehoboth Beach area. The key staff members, board members, and other interested parties attended the charrette. At the end of the day we arrived at a mutually agreed upon strategy for the overall master plan. We are currently working with the staff to refine the master plan and are beginning to look at the schematic plans and elevations for the facility.

√ ***Congratulations to the J.F. Shea Therapeutic Riding Center*** on their next milestone to moving forward with the construction of their new facility. The San Juan Capistrano City Council voted to waive approximately two thirds of the fees related to the construction of the new facility. We are very excited to hear that the ground breaking will be happening soon and are very pleased to have been involved in the design and planning of this facility.

√ ***Quest Therapeutic Services*** opened their new facility in a ribbon cutting ceremony this past fall. It was an extremely windy day that Quest opened their new facility but it was calm and quiet inside except for the excitement from all the well wishers that gathered together that day.

Since then, the staff, clients, and horses have been enjoying their new facility.

(Continued from page 2 - **Design Parameters for a Mounting Area**

The following describes the requirements for the ADA (American with Disabilities Act) regulations with respect to ramps. However, it is important to note that the ADA regulations apply to ramps used as means of egress within buildings, for exterior entrances and exits to buildings, and for level changes within buildings and outside of buildings. ADA regulations are not for horse mounting ramps and may need to be modified to ensure safety for the unique conditions when a rider needs a ramp in order to mount a horse.

First, ADA regulations state that the slope of the ramp should be a maximum of 8% or 1/12, which means that for every 1" rise you need 12 feet of horizontal surface. Therefore, to rise to a 16" landing you need 16-foot long ramp. A 1/12 ratio adheres to ADA, which was designed for a mobility challenged individual to be able to move himself or herself up a slope without anyone assisting them. ADA regulations also call for a maximum horizontal projection of 30 feet.

This means that if the mounting platform is set above 30" then the ramp needs to be broken into two slopes with a landing in between. ADA regulations call for landings to be as least as wide as the ramp that leads to it with a minimum of 5 feet and if the ramp changes directions, the landing needs to be 5 feet by 5 feet. Designing in a strategically placed landing may give you an option for mounting at different heights.

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Railings need to be along the ramp and at the back side of the platforms for safety, however, following ADA regulations exactly would lead to an unsafe situation for mounting a horse, such as rail extensions (extending the handrail 12 inches beyond the top and bottom of the ramps). On the mounting side of the platform installing a one to two inch square strip of wood or similar building material along the edge can act as a curb, to help block wheel chairs and walkers and prevent them from accidentally slipping over the edge.

The height of the rider's platform averages about 32" high from the ground, but that may vary depending upon the user and horses involved. The assistant's block averages about 24" above the ground. Ramps and platforms are mostly built with pressure treated framing lumber and the decking (top surface) is exterior grade plywood. Good material options for covering the plywood top surface include astro-turf, slip resistant paint, or slip resistant tape. If the surface of an outdoor ramp is covered with a material such as astro-turf, the decking underneath should be examined regularly for decay Closing in the bottom of the ramp and platform presents a solid appearance for the horse, eliminates shadows and prevents stray dogs or cats from wandering under the ramp.

Finally, one of the most important design aspects to the mounting area must include a consideration of the space surrounding the mounting area. If the mounting area is inside a covered building, the space will need to have adequate room, height, and proper flooring for a horse and rider as well as an unimpeded route for client, staff, and horse. Likewise if the mounting area is serving an outdoor arena, the path of travel to the mounting area for rider, staff, and horse should be as direct as possible, free of hazards and an optimal walking surface for negotiating rider and horse to the mounting area. Minimize sharp edges on corners and railings. Properly train horse leaders to be aware of anything that could snag the riders clothing, stirrups, or any other equipment.

To sum up, the optimum design goals for a mounting area should be safety, efficiency, and function.