

# HORSE AROUND

## Carefree Farms equine facility builds friendships and community

By Teresa K. Traverse

When horse trainer Alice Sarno arrives at Carefree Farms to start her work day, the horses and her clients know they're in well-trained hands. Sarno has worked with horses for more than 50 years. It's been her only job.

"I seriously think I was born with a horse gene," Sarno says. "I started riding when I was 9, and I've been riding ever since."

Sarno says she was always drawn to horses. She grew up giving lessons and running stables. She was born in San Diego, grew up in Las Vegas and has been in metro Phoenix since 1983.



Laura Borghesani performs a jump with Mr. Z at Carefree Farms.

"The thing that I'm impressed with about horses is that it's such a commitment. When you're around them, you really don't think about anything else," Sarno says. "What attracts people who have really high pressure jobs is, it's a way of coming out and just enjoying your horse. You stop thinking about the rest of the world. It's definitely a mind-eraser. You're just totally focused on what you're do-

ing at the barn."

Sitting on 17 acres in North Phoenix between the Phoenix Sonoran Preserve and Cave Creek Regional Park, Carefree Farms is a boarding and training facility that's home to 40 horses. The horses are as diverse as the clientele, who range in age from 6 to 70. Carefree Farms offers a wide range of breeds and sizes, although the horses are predominantly thoroughbreds. Riders also can enjoy the area's sweeping desert views complete with mountain backdrops and seemingly endless skies.

According to the Arizona Horse Council – an organization that touts itself as an "all-volunteer, member-elected board that provides leadership, sets industry standards, and unifies the equine community and industry in Arizona" – there are 177,000 horses in 60,000 households in Arizona. The metro Phoenix and Scottsdale areas are home to many horse properties and equestrian-friendly neighborhoods. And Carefree Farms has made a home and a name for itself among them since it opened for business more than 11

years ago.

Privately owned by a married couple, Carefree Farms has been in business for more than 11 years and was previously a thoroughbred training center. The facility features two full court arenas for dressage (training), two barns, a galloping track, a cross country course and a lighted show jumping arena so riders can practice at night when it gets too

hot during the day. It's available for tours, parties, clinics and educational activities. Carefree Farms specializes in dressage, jumping, show jump and starter lessons. Their clients take lessons, ride on their own and some even compete. Most of the clients privately own their own horses. Carefree Farms also boards horses provided they're in a training program.

"It's really basic training, but like in everything, there's many levels of training," Sarno says. Riders can stay in one level of training and then move on to the next level when they feel ready. Dressage helps the horses build muscle, have better coordination and ultimately can lengthen their lives.

"It's very important for a horse to have that kind of basic training," Sarno says. Dressage is foundational because when a horse is struggling with certain exercises at the next level, it's key to return to basics.

"Each horse is an individual, so you have to structure a program that's going to be conducive to further the education of the horse that you're working with," Sarno says. "You really have to be very conscious that one size doesn't fit all. That's part of the environment of working with horses – the challenge of being able to educate riders to ride their horses and be able to figure out what a certain horse needs."

Like Sarno, trainer and farm manager Laura Borghesani started riding horses when she was a child. She began at age 11 in Northern California with a horse named Sheba and continued for more than a decade both in California and in Connecticut, where she moved as a teenager. But after feeling burnt out, she hung up her horse tack in her early 20s. After earning her master's in exercise