

Redlands ranch has equine therapy program for veterans



Courtesy Photo

Gary Lemos, a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps, does a therapy exercise with a horse at a ranch in Redlands.

By Laurie Williams For the Daily Facts

REDLANDS — After his service in Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm, Army combat veteran Gilbert Mink struggled in civilian life. He was anxious, constantly looking for escape routes and assessing other people as possible threats.

“As a combat vet, I was at such a high level of hyper-vigilance,” the Redlands resident said. “My brain ran at 100 mph — never at rest, always looking for threats or danger.”

Mink pursued several types of treatment for post-traumatic stress syndrome. One of his best therapists, he said, was a horse. He met Shorty through a program called Equus Medendi Inc. The Latin words mean “therapeutic horse.”

The program, run by Angie Sheer, a protégé of “Horse Whisperer” Monty Roberts, began at Buffalo Meadows Ranch in Redlands some four years ago. Certified by the Trauma Research Institute, Sheer had worked to help troubled kids find benefits from interacting

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with horses.

“A friend retired from Army deployment and was dealing with a lot of issues, so I started working with him,” Sheer said. “He told me it had been a life-saver for him, and he had a question for me: ‘Can you do this for other vets?’”

Her answer — “Absolutely!”

Since then, she and volunteer business manager Steve Evans have set the program up at three ranches, offering veterans and their families therapy for PTSD, depression, anger management and other problems. They get funding through veterans groups, and have never had to charge a vet for treatment.

Mink began working with the program about three years ago, he said. He and several other vets and three horses began with a technique called a join-up, which puts a human

and a horse together in a round corral. The idea, he said, was to watch the horse’s body language and respond in ways that won its trust.

“You’re watching for specific horse behavior — like locking an ear on you, or lowering their head and licking and chewing. They’re showing that they understand you’re not a predator, not stalking them — that you’re their friend.”

A successful join-up culminates in the horse accepting touch interaction and following the human out of the corral, and that’s what happened with Shorty.

“I was kind of oblivious at first, just following instructions,” Mink said. “It was Angie who noticed it was working.”

One of the best things for Mink, something that helped him find a calmer place inside himself, was petting and grooming Shorty and the

other horses.

“It was a moving experience,” he said. “I learned a lot.”

The experience has a bitter-sweet aspect in that Shorty has died since Mink participated in the program, but he continues to do volunteer work for Equus Medendi Inc.

The nature of the horse is what makes the therapy successful, Sheer said. Horses connect with people as they build trust. That gives the client a feeling of comfort and a time-frame in which to address challenges they have been facing.

Evans said the program is now registered with the state as a tax-free nonprofit, and is in the process of getting the same designation from the federal government. For information about donating to Equus Medendi Inc., visit www.equusmedendi.com or call 951-941-0056.

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