

What a Difference a Horse Can Make

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Maggie is a sturdy bay Clydesdale/Welsh (!) mare we've had at our Orlean farm in Fauquier County for many years. She is an incredibly solid but sensitive horse to ride and was a fun and brave trail partner for me for many years. Over the years, though, I found that her very wide flat back was not working with my narrow hips.

Maggie is kind, respectful and one-of-a-kind (you are not going to find many Clyde/Welsh crosses around) so we did not want to sell her or have her be yet another pasture ornament. We thought that she would be perfect for therapeutic riding but the local programs I contacted were either full or needed a shorter horse/large pony at the time.

Eventually, a friend of mine who is on the Board of Directors for Ride with Pride Therapeutic Horsemanship near Staunton mentioned one day that they needed a wide, somewhat tall, unflappable horse for their more energetic and heavier or adult clients. We knew Maggie would be perfect.

Maggie has now been going to Ride with Pride for years on a free lease. She spends the spring, summer and fall months at Ride with Pride, then comes home to us for her "winter break". Through the years, we've enjoyed working with the organization and hearing about Maggie's many riders and fans. Maggie has now headed back south for her "community service" where she will receive loads of attention and excellent care. I know her riders and fans welcome her return.

Maggie was recently awarded the **Therapeutic Riding Association of Virginia's** Horse of the year for 2024. The award came as a shock, as I wasn't aware that Maggie had been even nominated. What great recognition of a job well done for Maggie and really all horses at therapeutic riding programs. These programs, staff and volunteers make an enormous difference in so many lives, from individual clients and students to their families and communities. I hope that Maggie's story can motivate others to share their "Steady Eddies" with similar programs; the horses and clients benefit immensely.

Therapeutic Riding Association of Virginia's Horse of the Year for 2024

Maggie is a 21-year-old Clydesdale Welsh cross. She is a lovely bigger bodied horse that can accommodate many types of riders! She is a dark bay, with a big white blaze and a blue eye! We love to pair her with students who may be sensory seeking, as they love to brush, twirl and braid Maggie's beautiful long mane and tail. She is also very popular among teenage girls who are struggling with anxiety as she offers a zero-pressure environment which allows them to be more receptive to learning and interacting with each other. In addition to working with her usual students, this year we called upon Maggie to work with two specific students, an individual with Cerebral Palsy (Lynsey), and an individual with a TBI (Brandon), who are also both non-verbal.

As with any student in a therapeutic setting, we needed to be sure we chose the correct horse. Both riders are in wheelchairs, and both are fully assisted mounting and dismounting. We would also need more side-walkers than normal as well.

We can count on Maggie to be patient in the mounting ramp while we settled both riders into their saddles, and we knew she would be ok with a crowd of people around her, since she does love attention. Her natural way of carrying herself and her big fluid step have been instrumental in both students' core muscle development and balance.

Brandon started to become so strong and comfortable with Maggie that he was able to start tracking his instructor's voice around the arena. After his third session with Maggie, we noticed that we did not need as many sidewalkers as we had when we first started, and that moment was incredibly profound for all of us-the family, the volunteers and the instructors.

Lynsey started to find her voice as she became more comfortable and stronger. She started to be able to express her excitement and desire to 'keep going' when the lesson was over!

In the barn, Maggie is an easy keeper. She loves her herd mates, and she truly enjoys her job at Ride with Pride. She will always pop her head out and say hello if you come visit.

