

 Live and Learn	Business	Criminal Justice	Health Care
	Technology Management	Undergrad/Graduate Degrees	



- [News](#)
- [Classifieds](#)
- [Directory](#)
- [Marketplace](#)
- [My Zwire!](#)
- [To Subscribe](#)

Home -> News -> News -> Features

Saturday 7 October, 2006

NEWS SEARCH

GO

[Advanced search](#)

Features

Horses go footloose and fancy free

Katie Fischer, staff writer

September 12, 2006

Email to a friend Voice your opinion

News
Top Stories
Police/Courts
Sports
Features
Weather
Calendar
Death Notices
▶ How To Reach Us
▶ Classifieds
▶ Lake Country Links
▶ Links to Our Other Newspapers
▶ On Wisconsin
▶ Business Directory
▶ Community
▶ Television
▶ Sports Wire!
▶ Fun and Games
▶ Consumer Guide
▶ Personal Finance
▶ Lifestyles



Horseshoes are known as a lucky charm for humans, but the equine population may be better off without them.

SKEETER GETS A MANICURE — *Monica Meer trims the hoofs of Skeeter, a 10-year-old palomino paint, using the AANHCP method.*

Monica Meer, of Town of Genesee, is one of five American Association of Natural Hoof Care Practitioners (AANHCP) in Wisconsin. She is spreading the word that horses can kick off their shoes and run barefoot.

Wild horses do it. Meer said domesticated horses can, too.

An advocate of the AANHCP method, Meer said the accepted practice of putting shoes on horses is unnatural and can be unhealthy. Natural-hoof practitioners use the wild horse as a model to feed, raise and care for the hoofs of domesticated horses.

Hoof and mouth (and more)

Clad in her chaps and toting her hoof-trimming tools, Meer travels as far as Door County and northern Illinois to trim horse hoofs like we trim our toe nails.

Monica Meer clips and files the hoofs, but she is much more than a horse manicurist.

She looks at the overall wellness of the horse, from its diet to its living

Advertisement

environment.

Meer's method is based on Jamie Jackson's study of the feet and movement of wild mustangs in North America. Both "The Natural Horse" and his most recent book titled "Paddock Paradise" describe his findings and philosophy.

Meer said in the books he explains that wild horses travel a 20-mile-a-day circuit. They move across different terrain, climb

mountainous slopes and tread on hard, dry land to find food and water. In their natural environment, the horses maintain a healthy, varied diet and their movement wears their hoofs, so trimming is unnecessary.

When a horseshoe is applied, the hoof is still growing, but the shoe prevents the hoof from naturally wearing away. Consequently, the AANHCP warns, the hoof becomes too long, which they say contributes to lameness - a condition that involves an abnormal gait. Many horses are euthanized because of lameness and the pain that can cause the animal.

A healthy hoof is important to the overall well-being of the horse, Meer explained. The hoof acts as a pump, so when the horse steps, the hoof expands, sending blood that flows down the leg, back up to the heart. Shoes suppress circulation and this blood pumping action, the AANHCP says.

Horseshoes can also cause the hoof quality to deteriorate, cause undue stress to joints, ligaments and tendons, and lead to other hoof abnormalities, such as thrush and fungal problems.

Eat like a horse

Meer said she thinks of horses as "exotic animals" we are putting in an unnatural environment. Her purpose is to allow horses to "function the way they were meant to," she said.

One of the main issues, Meer said, is that the exotic, desert animals are walking on and eating Wisconsin's lush, soft green grass.

Their diets are too rich, and they spend too much time in stalls. She said it is like putting humans in front of a buffet in a small room and just letting them chow.

"We are turning horses into diabetics," Meer said.

She has designed her horse pasture in Genesee using Jackson's "track" method to keep her own horses healthy. Jackson looked at ways to allow domesticated horses to live a balanced, active lifestyle. Using his model, she set up a "track" which mimics the wild horse's daily movement. The three-acre plot of land is structured like a circular racetrack with food, vitamins and minerals spread along the way. The hay and the food variations give the horses an incentive to move. She spread patches of road gravel on the track to condition their feet and minimize trimming.

"Horses can ride on what they live on," Meer said.

We stand ready.
The U.S. Army Reserve.
 Get enlistment bonuses, pay off college loans, and continue your education while you train near home.

[Learn More>>](#)


 U.S. ARMY

A nightmare

Meer's interest in natural hoof trimming and rehabilitation began six years ago when her 12-year-old mare, Star, foundered. The condition is an inflammation of the tissue that connects the innermost bone in the foot to the hoof.

Horses can founder from receiving inadequate hoofcare, walking on improper terrain or overfeeding on grain or grass.

She said she had fed her and shod her in the accepted way, but she still acquired the condition.

After meeting with numerous veterinarians and farriers, none of the traditional treatment methods worked, Meer said. She was told she needed to put Star down.

Meer was devastated, until she met someone who told her about the natural method, she said.

At that point, Meer decided that if the traditional methods weren't working, she would educate herself on the grassroots, holistic philosophy.

"I guess if someone is going to have to fix her, it's going to have to be me," she said.

She spent the next few years attending clinics and seminars about the many methods of natural trimming. When she began to research Jackson's method, she decided it was the best way to care for a horse. After four years of self-education, she took one year to get through the AANHCP certification course.

Riding in on a white horse

Star is now doing well and Meer has moved on to help others with their horses. Many of them turn to her in desperation after trying all the typical methods.

"There are a lot of horses out there that need help," Meer said. "I didn't have any hope, and that's something I can give people."

She advocates removing shoes and restoring the natural health and hoofs of the animal.

Hoof restoration takes time, so horses are outfitted with removable boots when they walk on tough terrain. In time, the boots should no longer be necessary.

Meer said she would like to see a "boot law" which would allow removable boots in horse shows and sports. Typically horses must be shod. They are also clipped, shaved, braided, polished and fitted with fake tails to be presentable at competitions.

"It's all about the people," Meer said. "There are some frilly, silly things done to horses."

On her high horse

While there are still many skeptics, the interest is growing. Meer, now a mentor for AANHCP students, is enjoying educating horse owners and future practitioners.

This year, about 40 people are in the certification course, Meer said. About 350 people are signed up for next year's course, she said. The estimated enrollment in the program by the end of this year is expected to be around 1,000 worldwide.

Two of the five AANHCP practitioners in Wisconsin are booked solid. Meer has about 200 clients in the equine family, including horses, donkeys and miniatures.

Other barefoot methods are out there, Meer said, but many don't respect the horse's hoof.

"People need to ask questions and get references," Meer said.

Hear it straight from the horse's mouth: visit Monica Meer's Web site www.thenaturalhoof.com or www.AANHCP.org for more information.

©Lake Country Reporter 2006

 [Email to a friend](#)  [Voice your opinion](#)  [Top](#)

Send us your community news, events, letters to the editor and other suggestions. Now, you can submit birth, wedding and engagement announcements online too!

Copyright © 1995 - 2006 Townnews.com All Rights Reserved.