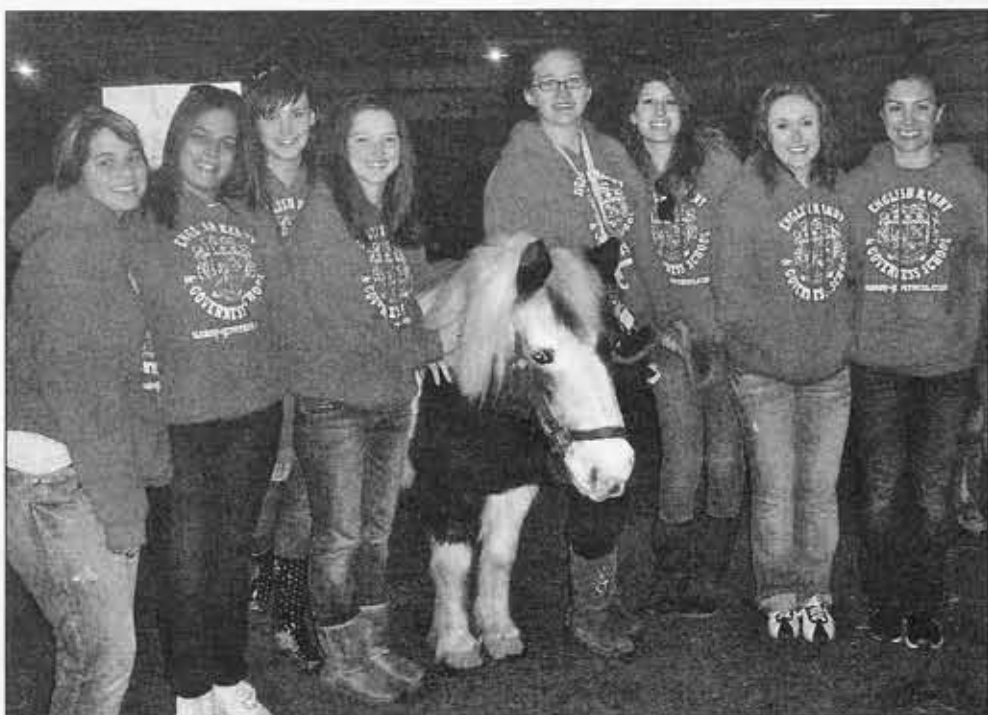


NEWBURY TOWNSHIP

Future nannies receive hands-on horse experience



Future nannies at The English Nanny and Governess School in Chagrin Falls visited the Stanton farm in Newbury Township last month to get hands-on experience with equines. "I never want a nanny in the field to be told she has to take her charge to a riding lesson and have her say she's afraid of horses," said Sheilagh Roth, founder of the school, of their visit.

By Ann Wishart

Two furry ponies, a stoic mustang and one well-padded Draft Cross horse gave eight future nannies a helpful kick toward their careers one cold afternoon in March.

The polite equines were ably assisted by their owner, Nora Stanton, at her farm on Munn Road in Newbury Township.

Stanton has been offering the 'hands-on horses' class for The English Nanny and Governess School in Chagrin Falls one day every three months for more than 20 years. She began the class in her indoor arena by reassuring the nannies about their reason for visiting her barn.

"You want to be able to understand and talk to kids about horses," Stanton told the group, seated on bales of straw. "You don't have to be a rider, you just can't show fear. It's really important you don't infect the kids with fear."

Sheilagh Roth, founder of the school, reiterated the purpose of the outing. "I never want a nanny in the field to be told she has to take her charge to a riding lesson and have her say she's afraid of horses."

After years of experience with many students, Stanton wasn't surprised to find several of the young women were quite confident around horses. Most were inexperienced, however, and one was, in fact, afraid.

Tying her mustang, Shoshone, in the aisle, Stanton explained about grooming and cleaning hooves. She mentioned horses occasionally even need a dentist. She also told them a little about the equine digestive system and why colic can kill a horse.

"They are really very delicate," Stanton said, despite their size.

Stanton emphasized some points the nannies need to know if asked to take a child to a stable for riding lessons.

"You want a quiet barn, a safe barn," she said. The stalls and saddles should be clean and well maintained, and the horses and ponies should be well-mannered and appear happy."

It is important, she added, to be observant.

"This isn't piano lessons. This is a large animal," Stanton said. "They can be the best companions and the best sport, but they are big enough to hurt people."

As she spoke, she patted Shoshone, showed the young women his teeth and moved around him, demonstrating the confident yet respectful attitude one should maintain around a school horse. If an instructor needs the nanny to hold a horse for a moment, it is best to exhibit a firm, quiet manner, she said.

A nanny also could be in a position where she arrives at a barn only to discover it is not a safe environment for her charge.

"It's the instructor's job to make sure the child is safe around the animals. There shouldn't be too many horses in the lesson," Stanton said, emphasizing the nanny must feel sure the barn is safe. "If you get there and it isn't workable, don't leave the child."

Several riders who keep their horses at Stanton's barn rode in a brief demonstration of horsemanship as she answered questions.

Nannies can find themselves in challenging situations. For instance, if a nanny has other non-riding children with her at the stable, they should not be allowed to wander about, inside or outside, Stanton said, or they could get hurt.

Then there are the allergies. "Everything in a barn is an allergen — hay, straw, sawdust, dirt, animal dander," Stanton said.

If a child is known to be allergic to these things, he or she should take allergy medicine before leaving the house, she advised. If they display serious symptoms at the barn, they need to leave right away.

As Stanton talked, the students edged closer to the horses and ponies, taking the opportunity to pet and handle them a bit. Following a demonstration on safe leading, Stanton asked who wanted a pony and was greeted with a chorus of, "I do!"

For half an hour, despite dropping temperatures, the young women built their confidence and skills handling the cooperative ponies. Even the student who admitted she always had been afraid of horses led little Coco in a circle.

Roth, who has been training nannies and governesses — women or men with college degrees who can also home-school their charges — for 27 years, spoke highly of Stanton's help with the program.

Roth also is a founding member of the American Council of Nanny Schools and has placed graduates internationally. Her school is located at 37 South Franklin St. in Chagrin Falls. More information can be found at www.nanny-governess.com.