

## THERAPY

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Fountain Inn Christmas parade in 2012. A young girl undergoing chemotherapy came upon a then 6-month old Tater Tot. Tater Tot made his way to her and bowed his head, allowing the girl to hug him.

"I told her his name was Tater Tot and she said, 'I love Tater Tot,'" Dillard said.

### A difference maker

Last year, Laurens' Jennifer Reeves wasn't quite sure what to try next to help her 10-year-old son, Wyatt. While he got along fine with other adults, he never had friends his own age.

"He was always that kid that was getting picked on. The bullying was non-stop," Jennifer Reeves said. "We tried different organized sports and he'd be the one picked last."

Academically, Wyatt would perform well some days and the next not display any patience for work and receive zeros on tests. On field trips, Jennifer or her husband always have to accompany Wyatt.

With middle school looming on the horizon for Wyatt, a frustrated Jennifer took him for testing. It was revealed that Wyatt was just off the autism spectrum, but had social problems.

One of their child psychiatrist's recommendations was equine therapy.

Now after weekly visits to Let's Saddle Up over the last 10 months, Jennifer can't believe the change.

"My son now has friends. In the last three to four months, he's started bonding with other kids his own age," Reeves said. "It's amazing. His teachers have told us that he's doing so much better."

Among Wyatt's new friends are fellow members of Trot 2 the Top 4H Club, which Dillard leads.

"The kids run the club. We just advise them," Dillard said. "We do fundraisers and they learn how to give presentations."

"We use the horse as a tool in 4H to promote patriotism, leadership, community service and citizenship."

Jennifer said Let's Saddle Up is not your typical once-a-week lesson. Dillard and her volunteers call her to check on Wyatt as well.

"It's a great program. I'm glad I chose this because he gets a little bit of everything - physical therapy, occupational therapy and developing balance," Reeves said. "Working with the horses, he has calmed down so much. I wish we could live out here."

### Finding a home

Solid Rock Stables' owners Pam and Ashley Riddle are happy Let's

Saddle Up kept running out of space and landed at their complex.

"I love to be able to help people and I believe in what they're doing," Pam Riddle said.

Riddle has offered riding lessons and boarding at Solid Rock Stables for 10 years. She said her horses have taken well to having more people around the past year.

While she's never offered any kind of therapy, she's given lessons to those with special needs in the past. She's been moved by the work that Dillard has done.

"All the ladies are super nice," Riddle said. "Animals just bring out the best in people. They really do."

Those ladies include Dillard and her six volunteers. Dillard said she couldn't do what she does without them.

"They are my sounding boards, my helpers and my friends," Dillard said. "We are constantly thinking about new ideas to help (the program) grow and reach more riders."

### Horse fever

Dillard said she has had "horse fever" since she was a little girl visiting her grandfather's farm in Central. As she was growing up, her parents bought a farm in the Five Forks area of Woodruff Road where, Dillard said, "We had lots of horses out there."

Dillard began working



MYKAL MCELLOWNEY/STAFF/

Sharron Dillard works as a nurse on Mondays and Tuesdays. Wednesday through Sunday though, Dillard can be found at Solid Rock doing something with horses like Tater Tot.

as a nurse in 1984, but her love of horses never went away and that's how she learned of the equine-therapy training.

"That just made all kinds of sense to me," Dillard said. "I could blend my love of nursing with my love of horses."

Dillard has five horses of her own. She says they get excited when they see the trailer when she takes one to Solid Rock every day.

Last fall, Dillard had as many as 15 riders. While Let's Saddle Up is a year-

round program, she has nine riders following the cold winter season. She's hoping to obtain more horses as she's had several calls for lessons since the spring has begun.

"Most of the horses (used for lessons) are Pam's horses, but then people who can't get out to ride their horses a lot will let us lease them," Dillard said. "They get the benefit of knowing their horses are being well cared for, getting brushed and maintaining their manners."

"All horses need a job.

If they don't have a job, you're going to have a problem."

Dillard still works as a nurse on Mondays and Tuesdays. Wednesday through Sunday though, Dillard can be found at Solid Rock doing something with the horses, working with the kids, doing 4H Club work or giving clinics.

"I don't do it for the money," Dillard said. "I do it because it's like I'm a missionary. This is how I'm supposed to give back to society."