

# Winter Horse News Comes in From Near and Far

This winter I've received inquiries from many of our seasonal Island equine residents, their owners, and devotees. Hopefully, I can keep you abreast of some of them and their activities off the Island.

As most readers know, the large working force of draft horses on Mackinac Island spend their winter months on farm tracts in the northern peninsula of Michigan. This also applies to the riding horses from the two commercial rental stables, Cindy's and Jack's. Most of these horses spend the winter turned out and feeding off bales of hay. A great many of these horses develop heavy winter coats, and some have shelter from inclement weather with lean-tos and run-ins. Herds keep warm and fit by moving around as herds do.

Blaze, the perky little Haflinger pony that has been part of the summer riding programs, stayed on Mackinac.

Morgan Brodeur-Bunker, an eighth grade student at Mackinac Island Public School, took on care duties in return for riding and driving him this winter. Usually Dr. Bill Chambers keeps one

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or two equine "pet projects" during the off-season in his barn on Bogan Lane. The hardest difficulty for keeping a horse on the Island in the winter is hay, grain, and ample storage space for both.

One of my favorite horses that has lived in the village for years is Topaz. This pinto gelding spends winters with the Dale Gough family in Pickford. Another horse owned by the Hribars lives as far north as Sault Ste. Marie, as does a Hackney team owned by John and Penny Barr. For many winters, Grand Hotel's hackneys wintered in frosty Minnesota; the Norwegian Fjord pony, Emma, owned by the Schullers, still resides in that state off-Island.

Not too far from views of the Mackinac Bridge, or the vistas of the bluffs awash in snow, is a tidy, well-kept farm and pasture land called Hawk Hill Farm. It's just outside of Mackinaw City, and is owned and operated by Joe Ostman, his wife, Angie, and their children. Joe boards many privately owned Mackinac horses. These include such Island equine fixtures as Dandy and Chief, owned by the Croghan family. Other Bluffers also board there, as well as Islanders who live at the Mission. Other notables



Island horses Scamper and Tom.

include Tom, a large blonde draft who has been a carriage horse for West Bluff residents as well as the Sheppard family on British Landing.

The Ostmans also take care of many of the leased horses used by the summer riding program.

Both Scamper Jack and Salsa live there. Others include such children's favorites as the Appaloosa Blue Moon, and the bay Lucky. Those two aforementioned horses are actually

owned by the Brodeur-Bunker family and the Olson family. Because of their proximity to Mackinaw City, these owners often are able to go over and see their horses in the winter. The Ostmans are great about taking care of horses and accommodating horse folk. Islander and blacksmith Ben Mosley will often travel to Mackinaw City on request to take care of the animal's feet in the winter. These equines are close in many ways to their summer homes.

Lin Sheppard traveled north this January from Florida to see her new horse, Atty, who is spending her first winter at Hawk Hill. Atty gets to come to Mackinac this spring and see how Island living is. Michelle Stuck also will be introducing two new Friesians

to the Island this summer; her Island horses live in mid-Michigan while not on the Island. Michelle, along with Marynnke Alexander, traveled to Las Vegas, Nevada, in late fall to attend the National Friesian show. Michelle later flew to Washington state to purchase the pair. The two new boys are named Gysbert and Hercules. Marynnke runs her own Friesian and brokering farm outside of Mount Pleasant, and she works hard in the season with her Friesian stock. She also has a Web site devoted to them on the Island.

Some people keep their Mackinac horses at or near their winter address. The horses of Mike Young and family live outside of Frankenmuth. Cathy Arbib keeps her four equines near her in Charlevoix. This past fall she and a friend, veterinarian Sara Michelin, traveled with their horses to North Dakota in the fall for a cross-country ride with four of them. Ms. Arbib plans to take one or two horses for a clinic in Indiana in the spring. She is already looking at her calendar to see what endurance rides she and her horses can make in 2007.

The Porters' horses live with son Matt and family on his farm near Harbor Springs. Our four Mackinac steeds live with four more Dunnigan horses here in Grass Lake. Several of these animals had busy weeks on high school equestrian teams, and will be ridden in shows and pony club events



## HORSE TALES

by Candice C. Dunnigan

downstate starting in March.

Winter is a tough time to ride or to train unless you're set up for it. Most riders take advantage of lessons, or an indoor ring. Others ride outside when conditions are favorable. Our horses are ridden four to six times a week here; however, if the trails and roads are iced, forget it. Trish Martin tries to travel down every five weeks or so to trail ride her Thoroughbred Grey, who lives with us in the winter.

Allison Jones and Libby Benjamin are two students who try to keep their feet "in irons" while not riding on Mackinac. Ms. Benjamin was taking lessons at a barn near Traverse City. Ms. Jones leased a horse, Andante, (who has been on Mackinac) from its Kalamazoo owner in the off-season. Some other junior members of Mackinac's

"Giddy Up and Go" summer riders have been taking lessons downstate.

I always feel once February has reached its midpoint, even the horses seem to tune into spring's approach. Daylight begins to occur earlier and last longer. The horses' winter coats start to loosen up and shed a few guard hairs, while their hooves gradually grow a little longer once more. There seems to be an instinctive feel that winter may in fact come to an end.

We wish you a happy Valentine's Day from our equines to yours, wherever they, or you, may be.

Candice Dunnigan is an active member of the American Equestrian Association, the Waterloo Hunt, and the Mackinac Horsemen's Association. Seasonally she resides at Easterly Cottage.

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