

MEDIA Coverage



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Adaptive Riding Program at Centenary University reaches 20 Year Milestone

By Alley Shubert

Warren County University offers a therapeutic riding instructor training program and an eight-credit course sequence.



In 2003, Tracy Cole of Randolph became involved with TRAC, first as a rider and then as an instructor. Tracy Cole riding Emilia Pedicini, class of 2022.

Centenary University celebrated 20 years of its adaptive riding program for adults and children with disabilities on December 4, 2023.

Therapeutic Riding at Centenary (TRAC) has spent the past two decades serving hundreds of individuals with physical and cognitive disabilities. They have additionally worked with specialized populations like military veterans, at-risk youth, and residents of assisted living facilities.

This article is a reprint from the original publication. Questions can be directed to marketing@centenaryuniversity.edu.

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TRAC participants benefit from equestrian experiences which in turn result in physical, social-emotional, and cognitive benefits, according to the program. It will also enhance specific goals such as balance, strength, and sensory integration.

“Reaching a 20-year milestone is a cause for celebration for any equine-assisted services program, and I’m so pleased to be celebrating this for TRAC,” said Karen Brittle, director of TRAC and assistant professor of equine studies at Centenary.

“In addition to serving TRAC participants, this program supports the development of therapeutic riding instructors and program leaders for the equine-assisted services industry,” Brittle explained. “By providing the training and education for both matriculated and non-matriculated students in achieving industry certifications, TRAC helps support the professionalization and operations of the growing equine-assisted services industry.”

As one of the few collegiate training grounds in the nation, TRAC is ideal for students seeking a career in therapeutic riding. It was founded by Professor Emerita Octavia Brown, D.H.L, who taught a training course in therapeutic riding for Centenary’s equine studies majors. Brown first taught at her farm in Bedminster and eventually at the University’s Equestrian Center in Washington Township.

These days, Centenary offers a therapeutic riding instructor training program and an eight-credit course sequence that allows both matriculated and non-degree students to fulfill all hands-on requirements.

The acclaimed Equine Studies Department also has a minor and a concentration in equine-assisted services for graduates to provide therapeutic riding services to children and adults. This concentration will cultivate the necessary leadership skills for graduates to enter administrative roles in the nonprofit field.

Centenary University is a higher education member of PATH Intl., which leads the advancement of professional equine-assisted services to support more than 53,000 special needs individuals, including nearly 6,000 veterans. Since the program’s inception, more than 100 students have earned PATH Intl. credentials through their work with the TRAC program.

Brittle hopes to leverage TRAC’s history to expand the program to include an offering of more specialized programs for targeted populations, updating degree options related to equine-assisted services, and expand veterans programming.

“The most exciting part of celebrating this milestone is that after reflecting on our strong history, we are planning for an even more dynamic future for TRAC,” Brittle said.

In 2003, Tracy Cole of Randolph became involved with TRAC, first as a rider and then as an instructor.

“TRAC has been a huge benefit in my life,” Cole addressed. “It has given me the opportunity to keep riding and become an instructor and mentor for the instructors in training. Today, because of TRAC, I will have the chance to remain working with horses long after I am no longer able to get on a horse.”

Cole further spoke stating TRAC is not just a riding program, but it’s a family.

“Everyone cares, and I mean everyone—from TRAC participants, families, and volunteers to Centenary students and barnstaff,” said Cole.

In recent years, Centenary’s TRAC program has gained international acclaim; the University’s resident veterinarian, Jesslyn Bryk-Lucy, DVM, was named PATH Intl. Veterinarian of the Year for Region II, while TRAC participant Vika Christian was selected as last year’s Path Intl. Youth Equestrian of the Year.

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In the early days, it was thanks to Frances (Fay) Todd, a close friend of Dr. Brown's, who funded \$50,000 as a gift in memory of her father Louis Starr.

As the recipient of a 2008 honor degree from Centenary University for her transformational leadership in the field of therapeutic riding, Dr. Brown recalled Starr and his passion for helping others.

Starr's family was honored to remember him with this gift to a notable cause he completely believed in.

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