



The Republican.

Holyoke lawyer Gina Barry recently founded The Joy of Jasper Inc., a nonprofit corporation dedicated to providing sanctuary to abused, abandoned, neglected or unwanted horses and ponies

Wednesday, November 05, 2008

By **ELIZABETH R. LaFOND**

HOLYOKE - Gina Barry would like to share the "joy of Jasper."

Barry, a local lawyer and horse enthusiast, recently founded The Joy of Jasper Inc., a nonprofit corporation dedicated to providing sanctuary to abused, abandoned, neglected or unwanted horses and ponies. At the same time, the corporation is helping local youths, too.

The corporation was formed in memory of a horse, Jasper, who happened to change Barry's life when she was a teenager.

"I worked with Jasper at Jericho in Holyoke through the Therapeutic Equestrian Center as a volunteer," she said. "I had a really strong connection with this horse - I had low self-esteem and struggled with adolescent issues in

junior high, and Jasper was the one who gave me confidence."

Jasper, she said, was always "clowning." He would stretch his neck as far as possible in exchange for a friendly pat or a treat - he loved apples. She said he also proved his intelligence, for example, by learning neck reining - the cue that tells horses which way to turn - in a matter of minutes.

But one day, Jasper walked through frozen mud and tripped, shattering all of the bones in a leg. He couldn't be mended and was put down.

"I always say, when the bones in Jasper's leg shattered, my heart shattered with him," Barry said.

Barry's heart slowly healed from Jasper's death, but she never forgot the important role that he played in her life. She went on to finish high school, attended Holyoke Community College, Westfield State College and completed her law degree at Western New England College School of Law.

For many years she couldn't figure out why Jasper was taken so suddenly, but one day it all made sense.

"After graduating from law school, I was walking my dog and it hit me. If Jasper didn't pass away, I never would have come to the place where I was so I could have a greater ability to give back and honor him," she said.

After five years of planning, research and much work, Barry found the perfect way to share her joy of Jasper with the community.

"Horses and ponies are powerful, yet graceful and sensitive. They have an uncanny way of inspiring confidence, self-esteem, trust and love in those who care for them," Barry said. "At The Joy of Jasper, it is

our vision to bring at-risk youth to the barn to work with our horses, so that they can receive these gifts."

Barry's first horse at The Joy of Jasper is Arie, who was surrendered in October 2007 by his owner because she could no longer care for him. He has already bestowed gifts upon one local 12-year-old.

"Since working with Arie, our student has gone from failing out of school to being on the honor's list," Barry added. "She has gained self-esteem, confidence and trust. She has felt 'the joy of Jasper.' It is our vision to bring this joy to so many more children."

Arie, a Dutch warm blood gelding, is a 26-year-old highly trained show horse who has been in many championships and qualified for international shows. Though he is older and won't compete anymore, his new role is a powerful one.

Barry said that, like her beloved Jasper, Arie has a fascinating personality. She said he will give "kisses" when he wants treats, such as carrots and sugar cubes. He'll also pick up a bucket with his mouth and hand it to her - again, expecting a reward. And he will whinny in protest when he feels that other horses in the barn are getting too much attention.

Horses at The Joy of Jasper are not available for adoption. They will be cared for and take part in the special programming for local teens, remaining with the organization for the rest of their lives.

As The Joy of Jasper continues to grow, Barry will join the Board of Directors to design and implement the programming for local adolescents. Currently, Arie and The Joy of Jasper is located at Fire Brook Stables in Holyoke.

"Our vision over the next five years is to add more horses and purchase our own plot of land for our horses," Barry said.

For more information about The Joy of Jasper, and to learn how to get involved, contact Barry at (413) 781-0560.

©2008 The Republican

© 2008 MassLive.com All Rights Reserved.