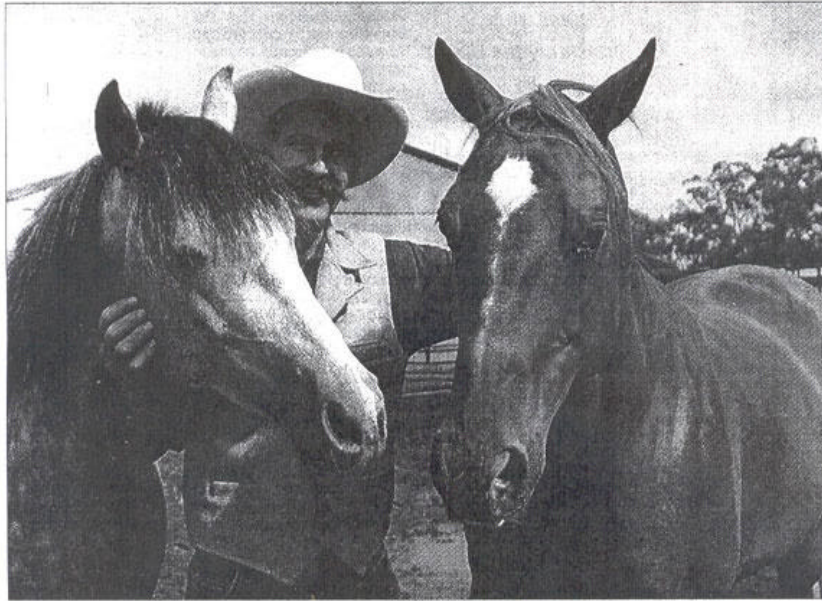


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Horse and Rider

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TERRY HANKINS/ARGUS-COURIER STAFF

"Horse Whisperer" Dennis Reis and a couple of friends. Reis teaches students how to communicate with horses in ways they can understand.

Horse and rider

Dennis Reis is dedicated to improving the relationship between horses and humans, and sharing his knowledge of gentle, non-verbal handling skills

By KATIE WATTS
ARGUS-COURIER STAFF

"This country was built on the back of a horse," said Penngrove horseman Dennis Reis.

Reis believes it's long past time for there to be a National Day of the Horse.

"My gosh," said one of his students, Joy Murray. "There's a Mother's Day, Father's Day, Grandparents Day, Kids Day ..."

Reis' fiancée, Deborah Fish, researched state and national data banks to determine there has never been a Day of the Horse. There are numerous Horse Days across the country, they learned, but nothing officially recognized. So, two years ago, Reis announced he would create a Day of the Horse — honoring horses and recognizing all they have been, and continue to be, to the people of this country.

With the assistance of Assemblyman Joe Nation, California now has a Day of the Horse: the second Saturday in December. Reis is working to give horses in the other 49 states the same recognition.

He pointed out that horses, and horse-related organizations and businesses, are a \$120 billion industry. There are, he said, probably 30,000 horses in Sonoma and Marin counties, and within Sonoma County, the horse business is second only to the grape industry. "As horse lovers and owners, we have a huge impact on the community."

On Aug. 30, Reis will host his

fourth annual Day of the Horse Seminar Tour from noon to 5 p.m. at Reis Ranch in Penngrove, calling awareness to his campaign and showcasing what he does best, gentle horsemanship.

In other words, horse whispering. "Horses need to be understood," Reis said. He shows his students how to communicate with horses through body language.

"People cluck to horses, trying to get them to go," said Fish. "But horses are non-verbal animals, and they tune it out."

When Reis first began, he trained problem horses. But, he soon found out, the problems were almost universally the owner-riders' problems.

Training the horses did no good: their riders had to learn as well. Now, you drop yourself off with the horse. "What he discovered," said Fish, "is that to truly help the horse, he had to help the human."

The relationship between horse and rider is based on trust and love, Reis said.

Ty Murray has been riding horses since he was 2 years old. Known as the King of the Cowboys, he's nine-time, all-around World Rodeo Champion. He and his parents, Butch and Joy, have spent the summer with Reis, learning his methods for communicating with horses.

"It's been like my college education," Joy Murray said. "I've ridden my whole life, but I never rode right and proper and had the same relationship with my horse. Dennis puts in a whole new feeling. We

came for a month, but we've stayed for three."

"People look at it from a human perspective, rather than the horse perspective," Ty Murray said. "These methods are faster, and better for the horse. He enjoys what he's doing, following your lead, following your subtle body language, your feelings. It makes him a lot happier, he's a more willing partner. It gives you 50 times the horse.

NATIONAL DAY OF THE HORSE

To help Dennis Reis work toward his goal of a National Day of the Horse, petitions will be available from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 23 at Jay Palm Saddle Shop, 414 Petaluma Blvd. North, supported by volunteers from Renaissance Healing and Learning Center. The following Saturday, Aug. 30, from noon to 5 p.m. at Reis Ranch, 411 Highland Ave., Penngrove, Reis will present a demonstration seminar of what he does, and share how it is accomplished. Tickets are \$65 each in advance, or \$36 each in groups of five or more. Tickets at the door are \$100. For more information and tickets, call (800) 732-8220 or 732-0629 or go online to www.reisranch.com. The petition is also available online.)

"Like Dennis said, it's getting extraordinary results with ordinary horses. It's retraining your brain to look at it from the horse's perspective."

Communicating with a horse is no different from learning another language, Murray continued. And much of that is herd psychology: studying the way horses relate to each other.

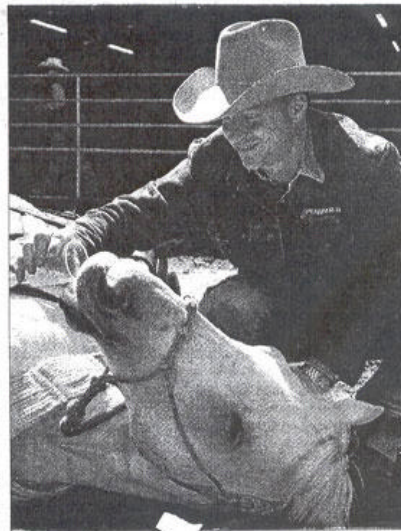
"Dennis works on it every day. It just gets better: more subtle, more understanding. It's amazing when you can get in synch with a horse, they can go off your thoughts."

Later, when Murray gets back in the saddle, he rides with no bridle, reins or bit, just a light rope low on the horse's neck. And he barely uses that, communicating almost entirely with the lower half of his body.

"Hands," said student Shirley Park, "are a last resort. Dennis teaches us it's your seat and your legs."

What Reis does, Fish said, "is really common sense. You learn how horses communicate by watching them. They bare their teeth, swish their tails and kick. We can't make those movements, but if you present yourself consistently to your horse through your body language, they will recognize that

See HORSES, page B5



Nine time World Rodeo Champion Ty Murray pampers his horse, Gray, with a well-deserved rest and a sip of his favorite drink, lemonade, for a job well done. For a horse to demonstrate this behavior, it must trust its trainer completely.

TERRY HANKINS/
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Horses

■ Continued from page B1

position and give you the movement."

Park said that with Reis's guidance, she and her horse are "taking care of some things we should have taken care of. With Dennis's direction, you can go to places and solve problems you'd have trouble working out on your own. And the bond with your horse gets deeper all the time."

Lisa Pruitt heard about Reis from friends. "I had a horse with a lot of go and no woe," she said with a laugh. "Dennis has given me the tools to generate a calmer horse and to communicate better with him: to ride and enjoy him without being afraid of him."

"Dennis is an incredible horseman," said Fish. "He's considered one of the top 10

in the country. And he walks his talk. It's not what he does, it's who he is.

"The thing that's so neat about horses," Fish said, "is they're so intuitive. They become our mirrors."

Horse whispering is a lifetime process, Reis said. "Working on it is what makes it interesting to me."

(Contact Katie Watts at kwatts@arguscourier.com)