

The Bluffton Sun



Serving the smiling faces, beautiful places of greater Bluffton and Okatie

Little horses are a big hit

By Joy McCaskey Carr
CONTRIBUTOR

When J.J. Kearney of Bluffton saunters into the activities room at local senior residences and programs, people take note.

It could be because he is just under three feet tall.

But mostly, it's because J.J. is a horse.

Specifically, he is a miniature horse.

And he is here for therapy – not to receive, but to give.

J.J. is one of three miniature horses in the Bits of Love horse therapy program run by Lynn Kearney of Bluffton, assisted by her family.

The Kearneys recently relocated from New Jersey to the Lowcountry and have brought their unique way of bringing warmth and interaction to special needs individuals in Bluffton and beyond.

Lynn is a registered nurse with over 25 years of experience. Both her children, Kevin Jr., 19, and Charlotte, 17, are integral parts of the operation. Kevin manages the website and serves as photographer and videographer. Charlotte is the volunteer coordinator and manages the finances. Both go with their mother on therapy visits when available.

Kearney said her husband Kevin, a

gastroenterologist, “graciously pays for it all” for now. He will be relocating his medical practice to the area soon.

While still in New Jersey, Kearney discovered miniature horses' unique use in therapy from a television show featuring a program in Texas. She was intrigued.

Kearney and her family then researched what was needed to care for miniature horses. She and Charlotte traveled to Texas to train for a month with the founder of Hearts and Hoofs, the program she had seen featured on TV.

Kearney said many factors inspired them to start the program. “Our family was always committed to doing volunteer work through school, church and various community organizations,” she said. “As a nurse, I saw a need for patients and residents of special needs facilities who are often lonely and lack stimulation in their lives.”

J.J., Crimson and Finnigan, the three horses, range in size from 29 inches to 36 inches tall, measured at the withers, or base of the neck. They have been thoroughly trained specifically for use as therapy animals, and were chosen for their calm nature and of course for their

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PHOTO BY LYNNE HUMMELL

Country singer Chris Stevers and his band entertained a crowd at the after-party of the Bluffton Village Festival on May 8. The Party at the Promenade offered festival-goers a chance to relax and enjoy a nice evening following a hot day on Calhoun Street. See more photos on page 32A.



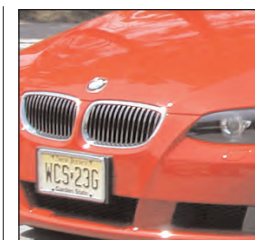
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Search for grandma's new home aids cousins in new venture

By *Bradley Dubin*

CONTRIBUTOR

(Editor's note: This is the first in a series of articles about finding the right retirement housing solution for seniors.)

Some might think it is strange that two big city brothers and their cousin, ages 29, 30 and 34, purchased a senior retirement community in the South Carolina Lowcountry. But it makes perfect sense that the former investment banker, real estate broker and attorney are now at the helm of Riverside at Belfair Retirement Community in Bluffton.

When it became evident that our 89-year old grandmother's health had declined and she needed daily living assistance, our close-knit family confronted the monstrous dilemma of where she should live, and began the search for the perfect retirement community.

It had to provide the special assistance she needed and the individuality, independence and privacy she still desired. It had to be more than an institutionally disguised, dime-a-dozen, profit-driven business. We were searching, with a sharp eye, for her new home, a lifestyle, and a place that could deliver the personal attention and platinum care she deserved.

This should have been easy for our family, as we have owned and operated senior living communities throughout the U.S. for over 40 years. However, it was no easy task.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau,



PHOTO SUBMITTED

Brothers Scott and Tony Kantor and cousin Bradley Dubin with their grandmother, Ruth Tischler

the number of people ages 65 and older is expected to more than double from 39 million today to 87 million by 2030. They will represent more than 20 percent of the population. They are the Baby Boom Generation.

Since aging Boomers will live longer today than ever before, many seniors entering their retirement years will require some level of care. In fact, the number of people who will require assistance with activities of daily living (ADLs) is projected to increase by 51 percent over the next 20 years.

Increasing numbers of adult children will confront the daunting task of making difficult choices regarding parents or grandparents.

Studying brochures is only the first step in preparing to find the perfect fit for your loved one. In recognizing the repercussions if mom, dad, grandma or grandpa winds up in the wrong place, I am sure we all wish that we could simply give the Magic 8-Ball a childhood shake and be presented the answer "without a doubt" when asking whether they will be happy. However, the only foolproof way

to ensure that you are making the right decision is to trust your intuition and conduct due diligence.

While preparing to become the new owners of Riverside, my cousins and I began assembling the yellow post-it notes that had been plastered everywhere from our bedside tables to our office desks, the frayed napkins covered with chicken scratch and random newspaper clippings, magazine articles and blogs that had been graffitied with our neon yellow highlighters. Little did we know that while brainstorming for grandma's perfect new home years earlier, we would unknowingly come up with innovative ways to establish Riverside as the perfect new home.

This is not a story, however, about one family, one grandmother or one retirement community. This story is about thousands of families, thousands of grandmothers and thousands of retirement communities.

While our journey took us from finding the perfect fit for grandma to running Riverside in a manner that would make her proud, your journey to find the perfect home away from home for your loved one will be equally successful with careful planning. Next issue, we will share our tips to assist you in the process.

Bradley Dubin is a principal of Bloomfield Senior Living, LLC, owners of Riverside at Belfair Retirement Community and six other senior communities across the United States.



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