

JESSE COKER

FREE REIN FOUNDATION 2024 CATTLE BARON'S BALL HONOREE

For nearly 30 years, Jesse Coker has shod thousands of horses all over Orange County. Every Friday he can be found at the Huntington Beach Central Park Equestrian Center (HCPEC), back where Jesse Coker Horse-shoeing began.

"My first account on my own was with Horse Play Rentals, when Mary Behrens [President of HCPEC] gave me a chance," he recalls. HB's Equestrian Center is also where he met his wife, Carrie, in the mid-90s.

He laughingly says that what drew him into this line of work was "a series of bad choices." He adds, "I wasn't born into a horse family, but from the time I was three or four years old, when my mom would take me for pony rides, I've loved horses. I always knew that whatever I did with my life, it would involve them. My parents, who are both highly educated professionals, wanted me to go get a college degree. I initially planned to do team roping and be a horse trainer or veterinarian, until I was in a horse-related accident at age 17. Once I healed from that, I never looked back."

Shoulder injuries from falling off horses in his youth have changed his horsemanship style, but he still rides. He currently boards two horses at HCPEC, and enjoys the sport of reining with Rick Baer Training Stables. His love of horses was passed on to his three kids. His wife once worked for Windsong Farm at the HCPEC and their two daughters grew up riding hunters and jumpers. Although their son rides, his current passion is baseball, which Jesse is learning to enjoy as well.

UNDERSTANDING OF HORSES

Among those who have never been exposed to horses, a common question is, "Does trimming hooves hurt?"

He responds, "It doesn't. It's like trimming fingernails. We try very hard not to cut them too short; otherwise, the hoof can be sore until it grows back." He adds, "Another common question is if I ever get kicked, and yes, I do."

Jesse communicates with others' horses by "making an agreement." He explains, "With each individual horse, there has to be an understanding that we both have a job to do. They allow me to work on them, and if I break the agreement, they get angry."

Just like people, properly fitting shoes and foot comfort is vital for well-being. "Every horse has a different job, and they are shod accordingly. The analogy I often give is, 'We don't jog in boots or slippers, and we don't wear tennis shoes while riding horses.' For the Free Rein horses who live in a more natural setting in the pasture, if they are comfortable barefoot, then the natural method is what's best for them," he says.

FOUNDATIONAL FOR FREE REIN

For the 10 years that Free Rein has been rescuing horses, Jesse has given his time and talents to keeping their hooves healthy, so they can do their very important job as psychosocial therapy animals. "Unlike other livestock, horses seem to be able to see into your soul," he shares. "For me personally, they have a very calming effect."

"Jesse is amazing," says Free Rein Foundation President Justine Makoff, who trained with his wife and rode and competed with his daughters. "He has such a tight-knit, well-grounded family, and he has passed down his legacy to his kids in such a beautiful way. He gives so much of himself without any expectations, and Jesse would never let you know all he gives. His gift to Free Rein is incredibly special."



DR. CAROLE HARRIS

FREE REIN FOUNDATION 2024 CATTLE BARON'S BALL HONOREE

"Horses are great for our mental health," claims Dr. Carole Harris. Her discovery of how equine therapy helps others break free from their mental and emotional limitations has been transformational for her clients, our Southern California community, and in her own life.

At the age of 8, Dr. Carole recalls how her identical twin sister, Mary, wanted a horse, which made her want one as well. Mary would go on to dedicate her life's work to the care of horses as the owner and president of the Huntington Central Park Equestrian Center (HCPEC), while Dr. Carole's path led to her caring for people. By combining their passions and expertise, Free Rein Foundation, originally called Horse Nation, was born with a mission having "twin" peaks – healing and helping horses and humans.

In college, Dr. Carole was unsure of her calling until walking into a psychology class, which led to a 35-year career in psychotherapy. With a busy job and a young family, she had little time for horses. That changed in 2010 with a phone call from her sister.

"Mary asked me to go with her to pick up some horses in Fontana that needed rescuing. There were 40 thoroughbreds that this guy was syndicating and who was in trouble for fraud. He left them with a poor woman who also couldn't afford to care for them. It was really sad. Their ribs were sticking out, their hair was falling out, and they looked so hopeless. I remember walking into her very dark barn with no windows and finding a gray horse in a back stall. I didn't have a halter, just hay twine, but I placed it around his neck and he let me lead him out and onto a trailer. It was as if he knew he was going to a better place. After that we began rescuing a lot of horses. Not all of them made it, but that one was adopted and had a happy ending."

PAIRING RESCUED HORSES WITH PEOPLE IN NEED

"I started thinking, 'Why not pair horses with some of my clients?' Kids and teens don't want to sit across from an adult in an office, but horses are a way to get them to open up and talk. I was introduced to EAGALA (Equine Assisted Growth And Learning Association), started going to their training sessions, and adopted their methods. Mary built the pastures and let me do equine therapy there, and in 2014 we formed this non-profit to help horses, kids and others from underserved areas. We did it all for free and put a lot of time into it because we believed in what we were doing."

Dr. Carole remembers her first equine therapy clients' experiences. One was a 7-year-old girl whose mother was having trouble with her. "Seeing the determination of this tiny person trying as hard as she could to put on a horse halter showed me she would grow up to be a person with drive, who wouldn't just give up when things got tough," recalls Dr. Carole.

"Another early client came out of the pasture telling me how the horse did the same thing that his dad did whenever he talked about his military experience – turn his back on him. We talked about what he wanted from his dad. I sent him back into the pasture, and this time the horse turned toward him. By knowing what he wanted and approaching the horse with different body language, he had a different result. He discovered what he wanted in his relationship with his dad, and that by approaching him differently, he'd get a better result. He let his dad know, 'Dad, I want you to be proud of me.'"

Equine therapy soon became a pillar of her practice, with nearly one-third of her clients coming to the pasture and an office in the Red Horse Barn. In 2019, she decided it was time to retire and moved to Maui to be with her kids and grandkids. Several times a year she returns to Southern California to see family and friends, and to help provide oversight as a Free Rein board member.

Looking ahead, Dr. Carole hopes to see both Free Rein Foundation and the HCPEC continue to welcome more of the community and serve more horses and humans. "It's important for the City to see the great work being done here

by Therapeutic Riding Center, which serves those with physical disabilities; by Free Rein, in the mental health and well-being arena; and to realize what a jewel this place is."

Dr. Carole insists on sharing the spotlight as honoree with other deserving individuals – especially Justine Makoff, co-founder and Free Rein Foundation president. "Without Justine's passion for the horses, caring deeply about the kids, and marketing expertise, we wouldn't be here," she says. "Our community owes her so much. I feel she is who we should be honoring!"

A FAMILY LEGACY TO CARRY FORWARD

Dr. Carole's grandfather and her dad, the late Bill Harris, formed the Brethren Community Foundation to help low-income youth and seniors needing financial assistance in Long Beach and Orange County. "He lived a big life. Even near the end of it when he had Alzheimer's, if you asked him how he was doing he'd say, 'Livin' large.' The Living Large Legacy was started by my mom to fund research into this disease so others don't suffer with it."

As a major sponsor of the 2024 Cattle Baron's Ball, Dr. Carole chose to take the spotlight off herself to honor her dad. She recalls, "He was always supportive of what his kids wanted to do, and he made me who I am today. He helped Mary build the Equestrian Center, and as a silent partner who gave her a good business sense, he helped make it successful. He was also an identical twin, and he and his brother were so close they could read each other's thoughts. He was an amazing man who left a legacy for us all to live up to."

