

## Local therapeutic Morgan horses win national awards



By Linda Campbell  
Lori Beasley stands with her horse April Love Can-Do, who was named the AMHA Therapeutic Riding Program Therapy Horse of the Year.

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ADRIAN, Mich. -

"I don't know when (April) is going to give up because she has so much heart," said trainer Lori Beasley, an owner of Morgan Valley Farm in Tecumseh.

April, also known as April Love Can-Do, is a 29-year-old Morgan mare that has been a therapy horse for 14 years.

She is one of two local Morgan horses that recently won national awards for providing therapy services. Children and adults with physical, mental and social disabilities riding on horseback can benefit from the horse's movement.

April Love Can-Do was named the 2008 American Morgan Horse Association (AMHA) Therapeutic Riding Program Therapy Horse of the Year.

Six Penny Constant Motion, owned by Howard and Dorothy Pennington of Adrian Township, was named the 2008 AMHA Individually Owned Therapy Horse of the Year.

Both horses were recognized during AMHA's annual convention, which took place Feb. 18-21 in Sacramento, Calif. AMHA is a nonprofit organization that serves more than 50,000 Morgan horse owners, breeders, exhibitors and enthusiasts in the country. It also serves as a parent organization to more than 100 recognized Morgan horse clubs and national service organizations.

April was selected as a therapy horse because of her attitude and the way she acts with children, Beasley said.

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ever had," she said.

"She is the sweetest, most kindest horse we've

"It was wonderful," Beasley said about April receiving the award. "It is very special because it was her that won."

Rebecca Cook owns The Right Step Therapy Services, an equine-assisted therapy center in Tecumseh and Grass Lake. She comes to Morgan Valley Farm on Thursdays to use April and four other horses during hippotherapy sessions. Hippotherapy is therapy done on horseback.

"The kids really trust (April)," Cook said. "She imparts trust to the kids."

"April's movement was the first thing that drew me," she said.

Cook said April is symmetrical in her movement and is flexible in stretching out or moving slowly. April will walk as slow as therapy participants need her to walk, she said.

After Cook started working with April, the horse would lean into the rider so there was no chance they'd fall over when mounting her.

"She's just a really nice partner," she said.

Beasley said children who participate in the therapy program look forward to it every Thursday.

"The horses do something to them," she said. "It's amazing."

Motion is 19-year-old Morgan mare and has participated in a therapeutic riding program for at least 10 years.

"We're proud of her because she was one of ours," Dorothy Pennington said. "She's such a special individual."

She added Motion is like a member of the family.

Pennington is a registered nurse who works for Bixby Medical Center's ambulatory department, and her husband, Howard, is a veterinarian who owned the Adrian Animal Clinic before selling it in 1985. He now does vet work from time to time.

Howard said a handicapped-qualified horse is determined by its temperament and stability.

It's a matter of the horses being "bomb proof" to get them where they don't respond to excess noise and movements, he said.

Howard said the therapeutic riding program gives participants mobility and pride.

"We do it for (people with) physical, mental and social disabilities," he said. "Our goal is to take a child with a disability and get them to ride unassisted."

Most of them don't reach that goal, however, he said.

The program "has taught me to interact with people with disabilities and appreciate the parents and care givers," he said.