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## Horse camp caters to sick children

Haslett family opens farm for summer program

By Sally Trout  
Lansing State Journal

HASLETT - Children with cancer and their families took a break from pain and worries Saturday.

Away from needles, hospitals and doctors, eight mid-Michigan children who either have cancer or are recovering from it got a chance to play, giggle and forget their illness, if just for the day.

The free program is called Camp Casey, named in honor of Casey Foote, a 12-year-old Grand Ledge girl who died in 2003 of bone and brain cancer.

Casey loved horses and was taking riding lessons at the Shoeman Road Family Farm when she was diagnosed.

"When Casey was riding, you could see she would forget her cancer and just have fun," said Theresa Foote (no relation to Casey), who donates her family farm to host Camp Casey.

When Casey died, Foote asked herself: Why not help others experience the same joy?

Camp Casey, held one Saturday a month for four summer months, was born.

Foote asked Molly Melamed, her personal assistant, to run the camp with help from Ashley DeBoer, an MSU education student, who is the equine director.

Rachel Dennings, 12, of Lansing got to experience the joys of riding a horse, swimming, taking a

### Treats recipe

After their riding lessons, the Camp Casey kids get to paint their horses with water soluble paint and then bake a special treat for them. Here's the recipe:

- Combine: 1 1/2 cup sweet feed with oats and corn, 1 cup shredded carrots, 1/2 cup flour, 1 tablespoon sugar, 1/2 tablespoon salt, 1 cup molasses
- Shape: Make into bite-size pieces using cookie cutters
- Bake: In a 350 degree oven for about 15 minutes
- Chill: Place in refrigerator for about an hour until hardened

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tractor trailer ride, arts and crafts, and much more on Saturday.

"I learned the post and jump positions and like to trot best," she said with a grin.

Rachel's mom, Christine Dennings, said the camp gives her daughter something to look forward to. Rachel has leukemia.

"She thinks about things she can do, rather than what she can't," Dennings said.

Two doctors are at the camp at all times, and two Michigan State University student volunteers help each child.

"This is a great day for kids with problems," said Ayo Ajibola, a second-year pediatrics resident at Sparrow Hospital.

"It's good to see smiles on their faces."

Ajibola said side effects of chemotherapy are harsh on children, but improvements in the technology and medicines have made the quality of life better and offer hope of a cure.

Mariah David, 8, of Eaton Rapids has always loved horses and even asked for a pony from the Make-a-Wish Foundation. She settled for a trip to Disneyland instead.

A leukemia patient for three years, she now is in remission but remains on chemotherapy maintenance.

Mariah's mother, Virginia David, said the camp "is just wonderful."

Sheryl Barnhart of Laingsburg, agrees. Her son, Drew, 7, made his second trip to Casey's Camp on Saturday.

"It's great to have a day where the focus isn't on cancer, where children with similar experiences come together and have fun," Barnhart said.

Dave Prior, 22, an MSU senior majoring in medical technology, is a volunteer at the camp.

"These little kids are fearless," he said, "and it's such fun to see them enjoying themselves."

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