

Horse show benefits kids, 'One neigh at a time'

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A draft horse show at the Allegan County Fairgrounds will benefit a therapeutic riding program for children who are battling cancer. The 2nd Annual Mid-Michigan Hitch Classic Benefit will be held on June 20 to benefit Camp Casey in Birmingham.

The event is part of the North American Six-Horse Hitch Classic Series of exhibitions and competitions.

The motto of Camp Casey is "Helping Kids Conquer Cancer, One Neigh at a Time." The program is mobile and travels throughout Michigan, offering one-day horseback riding retreats for children with cancer and their families. The retreats are held at equestrian facilities accessible from every cancer center in Michigan. The retreats are free and each can accommodate up to 20 children and their entire families. During the camps, the entire family can participate in events that include trail rides, grooming horses, horseback related arts and crafts, tractor and hay rides, horsemanship workshops, treasure hunts and team building exercises.

Volunteers make certain that the activities are available at no cost. In some cases, private individuals offer their barns and property for use in horseback riding retreats. Camp Casey is funded through donations and fundraising events.

Sisters Kate Johnson, of Allegan, and Cindy Walburn, of Indiana, are serving as co-chairs for the benefit draft horse show. The sisters wanted the show to benefit Camp Casey as a tribute to their mother, Marie Wuis, who died at the age of 69 of cancer.

Draft horses were a vital part of life for the sisters, growing up on Wuis Farm in Monterey Township. Johnson, who still lives on the family farm, is actively involved with horses and handcrafts leather harnesses.

During the draft horse event, competitors will be judged on the uniformity of the horses, cleanliness of the equipment and ease of the driver, Walburn said.

Joseph Hunt, 90, will also compete with a team of eight mules during the event.

The show will be held at 2:15 p.m. Friday, June 20 and at 9:30 a.m. Saturday, June 21 at the Allegan County Fairgrounds, 150 Allegan County Fair Drive.

June 20 events include all single cart classes for draft horses, draft ponies, mules, Halfingers and youth as well as horse/mule/pony team hitches.

June 21 events include a Dutch harness horse stallion presentation, tandem hitches, farm class, Classic Series six horse hitch class, the eight-horse mule hitch and Dutch harness cart class competitions.

For more information, call Johnson at (269) 793-7382 or Walburn at (269) 350-0988.

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