

nities for its members: six arenas for a variety of disciplines, several barns, a "party barn" available to rent, a PA system, offices, a trail course, and room for much, much more. In 2015 there were more than 420 members, up 100 from the previous year. The group expects

in 2016. It will make Jody incredibly happy, her property has become quite multidisciplinary. The Santa Ynez Valley Therapeutic Riding Center calls the center home. Buck up and hosts a roping event once a year. It organizes Hunter Jumper play days, dressage events and Western & Ranch events. The high school rodeo riders and Penner's hold events as well. There are many events that will soon be Cowboy Dressage and Extreme Trail events. The center is so action on starting a series of riding events, which is one of the most exciting Western sports in the country

on a long road and there were many people there upside down or on the brink of giving up. But that's in the past; we're doing extremely well now, things are happening and it's an exciting time," Hunsicker said. "It's amazing volunteers who work hard to make things happen. We need more generous donors to help us build

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# Santa Ynez Valley Star

May 2016 • Volume 1, Number 4

Every Issue Complimentary Every Time

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File photo

Horses are a big part of the community and the Equestrian Center helps everyone in the community be involved with horses.

## Equestrian Center evokes powerful memories

As with any story, there are always so many more layers than can be conveyed in one small column.

In my last submission, I wrote about the gem of the valley's equestrian community, the Santa Ynez Valley Equestrian Center. I heard from many friends after they read the article, speaking up with pride about their own ties to the center and its beginnings. It was heartening to hear how many people still feel a strong sense of ownership and contribution to such a wonderful community resource, nearly 20 years after the death of its founder, Jody Carsello.

Ramon Becerra, one of Jody's greatest friends, was one of those who contacted me. He helped Jody with her horses starting in 1984, when he first came to the valley. Jody was, without question, one of the most difficult people around, but she and Ramon got along well for many reasons. One was because of their shared multi-discipline approach to horsemanship.

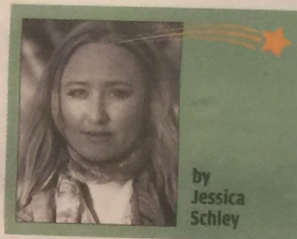
Jody had a deep history in cutting horses, but later got really passionate about classical dressage and the Andalusian breed.

"Her tack room was full of all sorts of equipment," Ramon says. "Everybody said she was hard to get along with, but Jody and I always got along very, very well."

Ramon himself is an amalgamation of many different equestrian cultures. He grew up riding vaquero style in San Julian, Jalisco, Mexico, then went to Casa Domecq in Mexico City, which is a classical Alta Escuela, teaching the highest form of dressage riding in the world.

He toured North America with El Presidente brandy, then rode at Kingdom of the Dancing Stallions in LA (now Medieval Times) and eventually settled down in the valley. (Now, if anyone ever says to you, "You know where he came from, right?" You can say yes.)

Jody had a special story, and a really strong vision, and anybody with a strong vision is going to have a strong personality to go with it. Much of Jody's vision was realized long



by Jessica Schley

after she passed away, but she laid the groundwork for it in her lifetime — and anyway, some of the greatest community projects take generations so come to full fruition. It's called a legacy.

One of Jody's most vehement visions for the equestrian center had to do with accessibility to all in the community. One of the ways in which that vision is being fulfilled is through the therapeutic riding program, which is a permanent part of the center.

The Santa Ynez Valley Therapeutic Riding Center has been located at the Equestrian Center since 2000. Annually serving hundreds of at-risk, disabled and otherwise qualified children and adults, the program has one of the strongest and most admired volunteer programs around.

With a small team of volunteers, a handful of instructors, and 10 horses, they sure get a lot done each year. Learn more, donate, or volunteer at: [www.syvtherapeuticriding.org](http://www.syvtherapeuticriding.org)

Meanwhile, the Equestrian Center is getting a new website that will feature an easy to use calendar of events and loads of new information about upcoming clinics, fundraisers, shows, play days, etc. You will be able to download membership forms and liability releases, and even pay for your membership online. It's due this summer. Visit [www.syvea.org](http://www.syvea.org).

If you think about it, The Equestrian Center is sort of like the YMCA for our horse community. And, like working out, you only get as much out of it as you put in!