



A season for healing



1 image

Ellen Miller-Goins

Nancy Burch helps Oscar Ramos, a U.S. Army Veteran from Las Cruces, gain the trust of his horse before he rides.

1

Ellen Miller-Goins | Updated 3 weeks ago

A group of military veterans and their spouses or significant others sit in a ring around an enclosure where a spirited Appaloosa stands with his back to Nancy Burch, owner/operator of Roadrunner Tours in Angel Fire, and Isaac Alvarez Cardenas, director of programs for American Indians In Texas At The Spanish Colonial Mission, Wednesday (June 24).

The duo is using equine reintegration training to demonstrate how compassion and working with the horse's body language can create a bond of trust between the horse and its trainer.

The horse is facing away, Burch explains, because he is afraid. She gets the horse to trot around the pen by slapping a rope on the ground behind him. Both Burch and Cardenas narrate, instructing the veterans for signs the horse is opening up to Burch: Is one of his ears pointed toward Burch? Is he licking and chewing?

Burch stops and, avoiding staring directly at the horse, waits to see if he will move toward her. He does not. She crouches low on the ground to make herself less threatening. The horse is still wary.

After Burch has repeated the steps a few times, Cardenas takes over and follows the same procedure.

Both are trying to communicate to the horse that they are not predators; they are part of his herd. They are his friends.

After a time, the horse faces Cardenas squarely, and with trust. He rubs a rope and bridle on his body, demonstrating to the horse that they are safe. He moves slowly and deliberating toward the horse and begins to rub him with the rope and bridle.

Cardenas explains he would do this every step of the way, with the blanket and saddle. Both Burch and Cardenas say this is enough for today. Trust takes patience... and time. It doesn't take a great deal of projection to realize how this applies to the veterans, all of whom have come to Angel Fire as guests of the National Veterans Wellness and Healing Center.

According to its website, the National Veterans Wellness and Healing Center has provided "week-long retreats for veterans, active duty military, reservists... who have been diagnosed with post traumatic stress (PTS)" since 2009.

All are encouraged to bring their "significant others" for a week long retreat that includes "Native American healing ceremonies, equine reintegration training, massage, yoga, aroma therapy, acupuncture, art therapy and reiki (a Japanese technique for stress reduction), along with couples and group counseling sessions."

This group is participating in the final June 23-30 spring retreat of 2015, but the Angel Fire non-profit will resume offering retreats in the fall of 2015 and, next winter, will host the 2nd Military Family Winter Weekend for active duty military, veterans, and their families, as well as "Gold Star" families of fallen warriors, at Angel Fire Resort, Feb. 19 – 22, 2016.

The National Veterans Wellness and Healing Center relies on donations and fundraising efforts to be able to provide its week-long retreats free of charge. Demand is high.

According to its website, "NVWHC plans to expand its operations to offer year-round retreats. In order to make this happen and continue to offer the retreats at no cost... (the program) depends on the generous support of our donors."

To make a donation go to <http://veteranswellnessandhealing.org/support/>; email info@veteranswellnessandhealing.org, or contact Chuck Howe at 575-595-0061. Checks payable to National Veterans Wellness and Healing Center may be sent to: NVW&HC, P.O. Box 805, Angel Fire, NM 87710.

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