

## Ten years of Peaceful Healing in Durham

By James Burgess,  
Licensed Massage Therapist

Ten years ago my wife Jenn and I devoted our lives to helping people by opening Peaceful Healing Therapeutic Massage in Durham. As state-licensed, nationally certified massage therapists, it has been our job to ease pain, aid recovery from illness and injury, promote good health and help people manage their stress and anxiety so they can find peace of mind. A decade later, our profession is still the most rewarding part of our lives. To have someone walk into our office in pain and watch them leave with a smile on their face warms our hearts and assures us that in some small way, we are making a difference.

During the years we have operated Peaceful Healing, we have learned a lot from life and our patients, which has in turn helped us become better therapists and people. From the experience of working with thousands of patients to attending regular continuing education workshops, we are constantly finding better ways to help the body and mind heal. As we live, grow and evolve, so does our work.

The most challenging part of being a massage therapist is educating people about this form of healthcare. Therapeutic massage isn't some new "alternative" therapy, it isn't a luxury for rich people, and it doesn't merely feel good. Massage has been studied extensively at institutions such as

the Miami School of Medicine and has proved to be a way to promote the healing of muscles, soft tissue, illness, stress and anxiety, boost the immune system, and so much more. All it takes is one session for people to understand what massage therapy is and is not.

Our Peaceful Healing practice has also allowed us an opportunity to give back to the community by offering a sliding fee scale for people with limited means because we believe everyone, rich or poor, deserves to be healthy. We also offer patients discounts on their sessions for bringing in food, clothing and necessities for worthwhile institutions like St. Vincent DePaul Shelter in Middletown and Animal Haven in North Haven. This way people can care for others as they care for themselves.

To commemorate Peaceful Healing Therapeutic Massage's 10th anniversary, we have completely renovated our office. We wanted the new carpet, paint and décor to create a beautiful, warm, welcoming environment where patients can escape their demanding lives, relax and heal. So whether you have visited us in the past or have always wanted to learn about the benefits of therapeutic massage, phone us at (860) 349-HEAL to talk to one of our therapists and schedule an appointment, or visit our website at [www.peaceful-healing.com](http://www.peaceful-healing.com). We are always happy to answer questions and help you in any way we can.

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## New saddle gives independence to disabled children

By Stephanie Wilcox  
Town Times

At Rivendell Farm in Durham, there are two young people in wheelchairs who can't sit up by themselves but who want so badly to ride a horse. Until now, the only way they could do this was with the help of another person sitting behind them providing back support. But two weeks ago, Rivendell Farm introduced these two riders to the "Independence saddle," allowing them to sit safely and independently astride a horse.

with the rider. The rider is accompanied by two walkers on each side of the horse, one person leading the horse and the instructor.

There is no longer anybody on the horse with the rider, but there wouldn't be room for them anyway. In fact, the saddle and attach-



Bay, the pony, is the only horse who accommodates the new saddle and riders.

Photos by Stephanie Wilcox

ing the sales person for it."

Independent Strides is the only company that makes these saddles in the country, and they have spent the last few years perfecting the design with help and input from therapeutic specialists. Lisa said she met the owners of Independent Strides while at a trade show in Hartford for NARHA, a national association for handicapped riders. The Passavants anxiously waited two months for the arrival of their specially made saddle.

To date, there are only four or five Independence saddles in the country. At \$5,600 a piece, each saddle is typically purchased for individual use and not for a riding program, like the Passavants have done.

All the riding instructors at Rivendell Farm are NARHA certified, and unlike many therapeutic farms, Rivendell Farm is closed on Saturdays to everybody except those riding for therapeutic reasons.

"It gives us quiet time with the kids," said Lisa, who explained that the farm was built specifically for therapeutic riding but has taken off in different directions as well. "It's their time on the horse, and this saddle gives them more confidence."

Rivendell Farm sees riders with everything from Attention Deficit Disorder to severe Multiple Sclerosis, though currently only two children who are in wheelchairs are using the Independence saddle.

"I can't believe we have this saddle, it's just absolutely amazing," she said. "I'm humbled that someone came up with the idea to help those that are less fortunate."

For more info, visit [www.rivendellfarm.net](http://www.rivendellfarm.net) or [www.independentstrides.com](http://www.independentstrides.com)



Lisa Passavant sits behind Joshua Francis, demonstrating the way he rode horses before the new saddle.

"There was not a dry eye when our first rider tried out the saddle and was completely excited to be on her own," said Lisa Passavant, who owns the farm with her husband Roger. "Our goal is to have them do something on their own and be independent."

The Independence saddle is a basic Australian trail saddle with a very deep, comfortable seat. It has adjustable and removable headrest, backrest, forearm supports, hand grips, Peacock Irons and a Safety Release System, all so that the rider with severe physical challenges can maximize their quality of life and self-fulfillment.

"Once you're finished outfitting the saddle, you basically have a wheelchair on top of a horse," said Lisa, adding that the saddle did not take away the need for people to be

ments weigh a whopping 50 pounds; English saddles typically weigh 12 pounds and even heavy Westerns only weigh 25. The saddle itself is specially designed to distribute weight evenly so the horse is not pinched, but even so, it takes some getting used to, not just for the riders but for the horse.

Horses have to be introduced to the saddle slowly, Lisa said, and because they aren't used to having so much equipment on their back, it is critical to use the right horse. The one Independence saddle at Rivendell Farm was made to fit Bay, a big female pony.

"She did really well and is generally one of the most tolerant to work with," said Lisa. "So much thought went into building this saddle with the person and horse in mind, that I can't even imagine be-