

Make it a "Mare-y" Christmas this year

By LAUREL ROBERTSON

This year, Christmas returns to its original setting—a barn—with the Mare-y Christmas Barn Tour to raise money for wild mustang rescue.

Texas H₂Oasis™, sponsor of the mustangs and the barn tour, is offering an inside look at five premier barns in the Driftwood and Dripping Springs areas, including the barn closest to its own mustang mare, Sally.

The tour begins at noon Sunday, December 13, at Bel Canto, a hunter-jumper and dressage stables south of Dripping Springs.

Patrons will enjoy Christmas carols played by the Dripping Strings ensemble and catered tapas by the Silk Apron while touring the barn.

From there, it's on to Penny Reeves-Goff's Graymar Farm near Driftwood, with its 70-foot covered round pen and outdoor show arena.

At 2 PM, tour participants will visit the newest barn on the tour, Royal Kings, featuring European-style stalls with old world woodwork and a covered jumping and dressage arena covered with dustless



Explore five local barns December 13, while helping raise funds for wild mustang rescue. Above, Spirit and Sally, the first mustangs adopted by Texas H₂Oasis™. Photo courtesy Texas H₂Oasis™.

poly-coated sand.

The fourth barn on the tour, Red Barn, is home to Texas H₂Oasis' own adoptable mustang mare, Sally.

Amber, a mustang filly adopted recently, will also be on hand.

Tour members can watch a video of the mustang rescues, snack at a buffet bar of appetizers, tapas and hors d'oeuvres, enjoy a roaring fireplace and join in the



Texas H₂Oasis™ founder Karen Bartell has mustang, Sally II, eating out of her hand, above. Karen invites you out to the Mare-y Christmas Barn Tour December 13. Photo courtesy Texas H₂Oasis™.

Corral Chorale—an old-fashioned Christmas sing-along.

Oakhaven, the final barn on the tour, uses skylights to illuminate its stalls and covered arena. It features a large outdoor arena and a covered exerciser/round pen large enough for six horses.

Tour sponsor Texas H₂Oasis™, a non-profit organization located in Driftwood, Texas, began its mustang rescue work in 2008 with two yearlings adopted through the Bureau of Land Management's mustang adoption program.

After six months of gentling and ground-training, the two horses were placed in a permanent home this past spring.

Of a second pair of mustangs fostered and trained this year, Sally, a chestnut mare, is currently available for adoption.

Founder and current director of Texas H₂Oasis™, Karen Bartell, says the organization got its start eight years ago when she was literally knocked off her feet by a yearling deer while out in her yard picking weeds.

"Over a period of six weeks, I bonded with this tame deer, and he changed my life. When I was with him, wild animals would come up and play at my feet. He was my ticket—it was either like I wasn't human or I wasn't there," she explains.

"After that experience, I became a vegetarian and went back to school to get my PhD in Environmental Geography."

In 2008 she helped found Texas H₂Oasis™, with its three-fold mission of providing environmental education, restoring and managing land and water resources, and creating an eco-sanctuary for wildlife and domestic animals.

Among its many projects aimed at fulfilling those goals, Texas H₂Oasis™ has sponsored Environmental Roundup education events, Backyard Ecoscape classes, and worked with other organizations to put on Earth Day and Austin Cave Festival events.

The organization is partnering with the Old Hundred Ranch in Wimberley to restore that piece of the Edwards Plateau to a natural condition for the benefit of wildlife.

Texas H₂Oasis™ is also creating a bird sanctuary near the mustang refuge, which will be available for school groups, 4-H, birders, Master Naturalists and other groups for environmental education.

The group trains volunteer "Worm Wranglers" to incubate caterpillars through metamorphosis for the yearly Butterfly Release at EmilyAnn Theatre and Gardens in Wimberley. Texas H₂Oasis™ also help produce the well-attended annual Pet Blessing at the EmilyAnn Theatre.

Proceeds from the Mare-y Christmas Barn Tour will benefit the organization's Mustang Rescue program. Donations to attend the tour can be made in advance or the day of the tour.

FYI • The Mare-y Christmas Barn Tour is Sunday, December 13, from noon to 5 PM. For more information, call 512-894-0105 or visit the web site at texash2oasis.org/events.html.