

Transcript Episode 8: Equestrian Center Assistant Jan Ward

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Hello and welcome to the Above the Rest podcast, a podcast all about the 10 Force Support Squadron at the Air Force Academy. I'm your host, Taylor Burnfield, and for this episode, I spoke to Jan Ward, who works at the Equestrian Center. She shared with me everything that Equestrian has to offer this spring and summer. Thank you for listening and hope you enjoy the show.

Thank you, Jan, for being with me in the studio today.

Well, thank you for inviting me. I'm so excited to get the word out about the Equestrian Center.

And how long have you been with the equestrian center?

I have been at the equestrian center for about two and a half years.

And how did you get involved with um working with horses and animals and that whole industry?

I have a lifelong love of horses. Um never got to own my own until I was out of high school. Um but I was always hanging out with my friends at the barn and would exchange riding time for manure removal um a lot throughout my house or my life. And then um when we moved out here, the job was open and I said that's my dream job and um they hired me. So feel very lucky to have this job. It's the best job in the world.

And so I know the equestrian center, there aren't many equestrian centers in the Air Force, are there?

That is correct. I think the only equestrian centers in in the continental US on military bases. There's one at um Joint Base Sam Houston in Texas and there's one at the Army's University which is called

West Point.

Yeah, there's one at Fort Sam Houston and then there's one at West Point. Um and then there's us. But other than that, some bases do offer stables for boarding, but we actually have the government horses um for recreation use.

Wow. And what So, as far as the Air Force Academy equestrian center, what kind of sets us apart from other um equestrian centers?

We have our we have our cadets there. Um, we house the cadet equestrian club team and the rodeo club team. Um and also we have I think the most trails available for anybody for the other as far as the bases go. Um we offer 1-hour trail rides. We offer lessons. Um we do hay rides on demand or as scheduled. Um, and ours is the largest of the other two.

And you all have events going on right now this time of year. Is that correct?

We do. Even though it's technically winter here in Colorado, although the weather does not quite show that, um, we do trail rides all year round, weather permitting. As long as the trails are not icy, um, it's safe to ride horses and we'll adjust the trails to make sure that we use safe trails. Um, so we do trail rides all year round except on Mondays. Um, cuz Mondays our closed dates when we get caught up on our chores.

Um, and a couple things coming up is in March we will have our spring break camp. Um, we do um various camps during the different school breaks and this one's going to be I believe it's a three-day camp as opposed to the one-day camps we usually do on breaks. and um and we still have some openings for that. Um but mostly right now we're getting ready for our busy season, the summer season, getting ready for summer camps. Um our summer camps are very popular. They usually fill up. Um they start signups on April 14th, I believe, at 10:00 a.m. Um but check social media for that. Um and usually by the end of the day, most of them are filled up. Uh and our summer camps, we do um beginner, intermediate, or advanced. And we also have a

week-long um adult summer camp in August once the kids go back to school.

Um our equestrian center opening day is going to be on May 16th um where we just have a lot of what we offer available. So the community come out and check it out and see what's going on, what we offer. Um we're going to have we're planning in July our hoown with the horses which is we're hoping to have live music at and it's again it's getting the community out um to enjoy what we offer. Um our big um equestrian center family funday will be in September. Um that's when we usually have bounce houses and we had axe throwing and the mechanical bull and lead lines. That one's a lot a lot of fun. And then to kind of round out our season, we're in October, we're going to do a bonfire at the barn where we're going to have a bonfire, weather permitting. Um, and hopefully live music and food and beverage. Um, and then we start winter camps again in December on the break. So, we have a pretty busy summer coming up and right now we're really busy planning everything, getting everything organized so we know what's going to be offered when so that we can make these great events.

Yeah, that sounds like a lot of fun. You guys have a lot coming up. Do you all have um things you offer specifically to kids?

Yes. Um so we offer so for guided trail rides, which is riding a horse unassisted on a guided ride. Um they do have to be 8 years old and that's for safety purposes. Um it's safer for the horse, safer for the child. Um but for younger kids, we offer lead lines which is I equate it to walking a big dog. So the horse is has a halter on with a lead line and an adult is leading the horse and then a child's on the horse. And we try to keep for rental purposes that's for like 6 years old and up. Um again it's for safety, it's for body control, you know, trying to keep balanced on a horse. Um during our special events, we will allow younger children to do that and have the adults walk with them, but that's only at our special events.

Okay. Oh, and we also have our mini horses. Um, we have a mini horse, Laramie, and we have a mini donkey, Jack. And they love getting pets and loved on. Um, little kids can come in and do

that. And we've recently got four goats. Um, and they are they love to be played with and and loved on and brushed and hugged on.

So, is that something people can rent out for birthday parties or events?

Yes, they can rent out for a birthday party or an event or just a random day. Um they can um customers can call us up making a reservation. It's right now it's \$25 for a half an hour of with the minis and the goats or it's um \$25 for half an hour for a parent led lead line. Um we just run out the horse with the that's tacked up ready to go. the parent can lead the horse, you know, in the arena or on the trails, whichever place they want to. Um, so it's actually a good deal. You can also have it with our staff leading the horse on the lead line. It just cost a little bit more

I was curious with horseback riding. I've always heard that it's good for your posture. Is that true?

Um, I imagine it is because you do have to have pretty good core strength for balance um as the horse is moving. Now, our guided trail rides are all walking um so they're not difficult. They're great for beginners um because we try we don't take any crazy routes up rocks um or down big ravines or anything, but we um have a lot of trails out there and we try to switch them up and they're all beginner friendly. So, yeah, using your core muscles to stay up, that's that is important. Not necessary. I mean, you can just kind of flop around a little bit. No, don't flop around. Take that part out. Um, but our guided trail rides are for um they are tailored for beginner riders.

Um, and like I said, they're just walking trail rides. We don't trot, we don't gallop. Um, just not safe. Um, and the the trails are beginner friendly and the horses are beginner friendly.

Okay. Do you all plan on doing any trail rides at Farish? cuz I know you guys did some last year.

Yes, we did them last September and they're fabulous cuz they coincided with the leaves turning and it was absolutely beautiful and we are doing them. We are definitely doing them again in the end of September to hopefully coincide with the leaves turning again. Um we are planning them. We haven't gotten dates down yet. Um but it'll be towards the end of September.

Okay. And if people are interested in signing up for those trail rides or events, how would they go about signing up for that?

Um the easiest way is to go to the website which is through the 10th FSS support squadron um website and click on equestrian center. They'll there's a box. It's for trail rides and events. Um that's the easiest way from people because you don't have to wait for us. Um, you can also call us at our rental office um at the number 719-333-4607. Um, if our staff is in the office, they will answer the phone and be able to book your ride or leave us a message. We're great at calling people back. Um, and we can book a ride that way or you can book through outdoor recreation because we do fall under the outdoor recreation umbrella.

Okay. Okay, that's good to know. Are people able to do like custom trail rides? Like if they had maybe they were doing a Unite event or something like that, is that an option?

Yes, we do custom trail rides. Um we've had various work centers come out and they'll do a trail ride and then they'll rent our event barn and have like food catered in and use that space for for fellowship or camaraderie. Um, we've had uh different groups come out and rent games and bounce houses from Outdoor Rec to have set up out there so they can have a family day in addition to the trail rides and or we and we do birthday parties, we do retirements and um we can customize any event towards anyone's budget or needs or age groups.

Okay, that's good to know. What is your favorite part about your job?

Um, well, the horses, um, there's certain horses I go out and pretty much every day give a big hug on the neck to because they're just such majestic creatures and they're so funny and

they've got such great personality. Um, so I walk out and Dennis is my favorite horse. Don't tell the other ones. Um, but he sees me coming and I think he rolled his eyes if he could roll his eyes and he's like, "Oh, here she comes again." and I give him a big hug on the neck and he try I think he hugs me back. I'd like to think he does. Um but that's my favorite part is just being around the horses. If I can get out and ride that's even better.

Yeah. How many horses do you all have out there?

So there are 22 of what we call our dude horses which are the government owned horses. That includes our mini and our mini donkey. And then there are 81 boarded horses which are privately owned horses um that are owned by cadets or active duty retiree DOD ID car holders um and then the four goats.

Okay.

Yeah. And actually our numbers are a little down right now. So we do offer boarding. We have three levels of boarding. We have self-care, partial care, and full care. Um and for DoD ID card holders. So, if you know anyone with a horse that needs a cool place to to sleep, we got we got you.

And you mentioned you all are on the youth office support.com website. Are you all anywhere else? Do you have social media where people can find you?

We are on Facebook and it is I believe it's US Air Force Academy Equestrian Center on the Facebook. Um, and we try to put up all of our upcoming events around there and then just random stuff and sometimes it'll be a video of Marvin or mule just spraying coming out and anyone can come out and walk through the equestrian center. Um, say hi to the horses. Um, do not go in any enclosures with horses, but we love having visitors out there to come out and say hi to the horses. um and just walk through it because it's a beautiful location and it's just nice that we anyone's can use the hiking trails. Um watch out for the horses.

yeah, it's a great it's a great place.

It is a great place. I think it's the best place on the academy.
But that's my opinion.

Well, thank you so much, Jan, for speaking with us today.

Well, again, thank you for having us out and helping us to get
the word out that the equestrian center is here.

Thank you again for listening and be sure to stay up-to-date on
everything happening at the support squadron on our website
usafasupport.com and our various social media profiles on
Instagram, Facebook and YouTube.