

Horse behaviourist to offer instruction April 6

By ERIC PLUMMER, Herald-Tribune staff

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Horses can teach us a great deal about ourselves, according to equine behaviour specialist Netti Barr.

She presents Equine Psychology and behaviour at the Grande Prairie Regional College's Fairview campus on March 30, and at the college's Grande Prairie campus April 6, offering instruction on how interacting with horses can provide valuable insights into human relationships.

"It causes people to revisit certain patterns about themselves," said Barr. "The foal will learn from the mare by mirroring her behaviour, but horses will also mirror our behaviour."

When she isn't raising horses on a ranch in Elmworth, southwest of Beaverlodge, Barr travels across North America giving presentations on horse behaviour.

Sometimes she lectures to a specialized audience, like the animal health technology students she visits every year in Fairview, but Barr also offers her experience to the general public, as will be the case in the upcoming lectures at the GPRC campuses.

The presentations are sponsored by the Alberta Equestrian Federation, an organization that represents the horse industry in the province. The federation is looking to provide more educational opportunities in northern Alberta.

"Some of the best-bred horses come from here, so we need to start putting more attention in the north," Barr said.

She has given horse leadership presentations to firefighters, policemen, veterinarians, businessmen, educators and last year had a clinic with the City of Grande Prairie's administrative staff.

Barr has found that a critical part of dealing with horses is finding the right balance between aggression and passivity.

"Rather than immediately flying off the handle, you learn to be assertive instead of aggressive," she said. "You learn to deal with things as effectively as you need to, but not more than that."

Passive characteristics also become evident quickly, and Barr has seen well-trained horses misbehave with handlers who lack a strong presence.

"A person who is a little bit more of a pushover in their life, although this horse is very well-trained and knows better than to invade somebody's space, as soon as the horse knew that person was a pushover he invaded their space."

Barr calls this "emotional fitness." which is brings a greater sense of confidence, personal motivation and responsibility.

"When we find that balance, not only are we happier with ourselves because we won't get walked on, but we're also happier amongst other people," she said.

"People start appreciating us more because they want to work with us and be around us."

After horseback riding in her childhood, Barr was away from the animals until 15 years ago when she moved from Fort Macleod in southern Alberta to her ranch in Elmworth. Involvement with horses has helped Barr to slow down and appreciate the finer things in life.

"Material things wear out, they come and go, they break, but there are certain things that remain constant in our life and one of those is relationships," she said.

"I think that horses teach us a lot about relationships as well."

"I find it very rewarding, it's been a wonderful journey for me," added Barr. "It's also helped myself in my own life. You have to practise those principals to teach them."

The lectures take place at GPRC Fairview on March 30 from 5 to 8 p.m. in the Animal Science Lecture Theatre, and in the college's Grande Prairie campus on April 6 from 7 to 10 p.m. in room L106.

Tickets are \$25 each, and can be obtained from the Alberta Equestrian Federation at 1-877-463-6233 or www.albertaequestrian.com.

eric@dailyheraldtribune.com