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Joyful Juniors

Young rodeo stars like Olivia Bongiorno learn and enjoy



Ron Ringen photo

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Horsetrader photo



Charlize Jass enjoys her go at the Boots & Bling event last May at CRC Ranch in Temecula.

Courtesy photo



Savannah Jass gets encouragement from her dad, Vaughn.



Finding fun between runs at the Boots & Bling.

The Devenport Training Junior Rodeo Team is all ears for coach Mindy van Loggerenberg during a recent Thursday evening lesson at San Pasqual Valley Ranch in Escondido.

More than just a learning barn, Devenport Training's Rodeo program is now a 'family'

BY HORSETRADER STAFF

ESCONDIDO — By 6 p.m. at the San Pasqual Valley Ranch arena, the weekday junior rodeo practice is winding down. All 14 girls -- ranging from age six to 15 and from beginner to advanced -- listen to their coach's comments as each one takes their horse's turn through one last practice pattern. It's clear the young riders are learning, and even clearer they are having fun.

"Many of my members have been together on this team for years now," says the coach, Mindy van Loggerenberg. "They are growing up with each other. Older members are like big sisters, and the younger ones are mentored, monitored, loved and treated like... well, little siblings."

The family theme runs through the entire Devenport Training Program. Mindy's father, Lynn Devenport, arrived at this remarkable facility

in 2004 when it was called Cloverdale Ranch. Mindy, who graduated from high school that year, went on to college and competed in college rodeo before returning nine years ago where Lynn planted a seed.

Lyn, who raised Mindy with horses from Day One -- first in Texas, then New Mexico, and eventually Bonsall where he managed Rawhide Ranch -- asked his daughter if she would run his lesson program.

Since then, it has grown like grass under a leaky spigot.

"My dad gave me the opportunity and enough freedom to see what I could make of it," says Mindy, who initially taught lessons to adults or kids, mostly beginning riders or those with some experience looking to learn more. Clients who wanted to advance into ranch sorting or roping would start with her, "and if I did my job prop-



Mindy van Loggerenberg and some of her team.

erly, move them to my dad for advanced lessons.”

Along with her dad, her mother, Delia, has been a key influence in life and with horses until she passed away a few years ago. A few girls ran barrels with Delia, and eventually Mindy took over the barrel racers. About this time, the passion to coach became clear.

“I don’t think that I was really, truly committed to this career until one of my riding lesson students wanted to become a barrel racer, and I helped her find her first horse of her own,” says Mindy.

“That feeling – of starting out with someone brand new to all of this and teaching them from scratch, teaching them into confidence and hopes and dreams of a future in rodeo, helping them turn those into goals, and then accomplishing those goals,

one at a time and setting new ones -- there is nothing like that feeling for me,” she adds. “That first time, with that first little girl -- THAT was when I was hooked, and knew I was where I belonged.”

Today, the Devenport Training Rodeo Team has 29 members, both youth and adults, coming from throughout San Diego and Riverside counties. The Devenport Training Lesson Program has over 70 riding lesson students, three other instructors, and the Rodeo Team. The number does not include Lynn’s advanced lessons in riding, sorting and roping.

“Truly, this team is more than a collection of clients, they are family,” Mindy says. “They say it takes a village to raise children, and I can genuinely say we are exactly that way -- the parents on the team are parental fig-

SPVR DEVENPORT TRAINING RODEO TEAM ROSTER

Shealynn Siataga	Olivia Markey
Addisyn Armstrong	Olivia Meadows
Adalee Short	Olivia van Doorn
Alex Hazel	Rachael Tanzer
Annabel Doll	Paige Potok
Bella Tarantino	Parker Rose
Cassie Furguson	Gleeson
Charlize Jass	Quinn Haas
Savannah Jass	Rebecca Pierce
Faith Marshall	Roxy Chavez
Gabrielle Barrier	Samara Cumming
Giovanna Schafer	Shayla Haggerty
Mia Haugen	Sydney Schenk
Morgan Arroyo	Vaunne Henderson
Olivia Bongiorno	Zoey Harmon



Lyn Devenport, here with daughter Mindy, receives a California Junior Rodeo Association Lifetime Achievement Award.



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Courtesy photo

After three years with the team, Giovanna Schafer, 15, now assists Mindy.



Courtesy photo

Teammates Olivia Bongiorno and Savannah Jass check order of go at a Junior Rodeo event.



Courtesy photo

CHSRA District 8 Queen Rachael Tanzer; her mother, Wendy, trained with the Devenports.



Courtesy photo

ures to all of the kids, they are a safe place, a structured place for the kids to learn and grow in, in many ways we are a world of our own. I have never heard of another rodeo team like this, anywhere."

At the center of it all is the horse. As Mindy tells it, the heart.

"Did you know that a horse can hear a human heartbeat up to four feet away?," she asks. "Or that in a herd, horses will match their heart rates to each other, so that they are so in sync, that if one horse's heart rate spikes, they all immediately know?"

"The level of connection and intuition that a horse can give is unmatched," she adds. "To find that one special horse, to have that singular level of connection with another creature where no words are exchanged -- it cannot be sufficiently described."

"And all of this, everything mentioned above, was born of someone just wanting to, one day, ride a horse."

Riders come in a variety of levels and abilities, each with their own path.

"We have some who are very advanced, riding incredibly talented horses, and we also have some who are just starting out, or who own horses they are still training -- and many in between," she says. "I have some students who just take to riding like a fish to water -- no fear and pure raw talent, and some who have had to overcome fears."

Mindy embraces the challenge to engender team unity while still competing as individuals.

"Rodeo is an individual sport, with really the only exception being team roping where you have a partner, but outside of that, at the end of the day there is only one winner," says Mindy, a competitor in her own right who has won the California High School State Finals in the break-away and a total of nine saddles. "Our team competes with each other, but against each other. Last year two of my girls fought through a three-day finals to win a saddle they had been competing for all year long. It came down to the last day, and when



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the dust settled -- hundreds of points later -- it was decided by four measly points between them.

"One of my favorite things is watching our members supporting each other, lined up at the fence for each run, yelling and cheering for their teammates, and celebrating with them even if that runner just bested their own time," she adds. "Or when someone has a bad day or a bad run, and watching the team surround that girl and build her back up, get her pumped and excited for her next run. And every time -- every single run, good or bad-- they have teammates there."

In addition to person-to-person growth, Mindy enjoys seeing the person-to-animal connection, too.

"These riders -- kids and adults alike -- grow in so many ways. What rodeo gives them is a deep understanding and compassion for animals, not only the horses but also the livestock that is the lifeblood of rodeo. It teaches them responsibility, compassion, resilience, determination, independence, problem solving skills, how to balance seeing the big picture while paying due to the little details that build it.

"More than anything, I see riding and rodeo giving people confidence," she says. "Not the kind of confidence that you first think of when the word is mentioned -- happiness and boldness -- but a deeper confidence that comes from within. "I am speaking of the kind of confidence that is so pure that someone can look at themselves wholly and see all their strengths and weaknesses and only feel inspired by themselves," she concludes. "They take a 1,200-pound animal, and not only control it, direct it, but feed and care and nurture it, making more of it today than it was yesterday. These riders work and sweat and cry and bleed for the sport of rodeo, and at the end of the day, whether it went good or bad, they come home, care for their horse, and start all over again tomorrow."

MORE ONLINE:

<https://bit.ly/407jrrodeo>



A "family portrait" of Devenport Training Junior Rodeo Team members and parents at a recent Temecula show.



2024 CHSRA State Finalists included (left to right) Quinn Haas, Shealynn Siataga, Zoey Harmon and Olivia Bongiorno.



Addi Armstrong, a roping student of Lyn Devenport, takes his turn.