



Meet Thunder

Thunder is the newest member of the Bixby family. We recently adopted Thunder from the Aspire Therapeutic Riding Program in Waterloo. Like many of you, I had heard of Aspire, but never gave it much thought until now. We were looking for a pony for our children and a local horse trainer, Jenna Pearce, who also works at Aspire, recommended Thunder. Thunder has been living at the Aspire farm for several years and as many people do at some point in their lives, was becoming a little dissatisfied with his job in life and needed a change. This is understandable, because the horses at Aspire have a very important and tough job to do. After visiting the farm myself, I would say the horses there are more like counselors or paramedics for young souls who need someone to connect with.

I am a veterinarian at Taylor Veterinary Hospital where we care for all small pets. However, once a month I do work at horse sale at a sale barn in northeast Iowa. I know first hand that there are many horses who come through the sale with life stories that include neglect, abuse, abandonment and physical impairments. Sadly, our communities are filled with children who have similar life struggles. Until this week, I didn't realize that at Aspire, the loving staff there can pair up children whose life stories and struggles mirror an Aspire horse's life story. I am very proud that there is such a unique and worthwhile program right here in the Cedar Valley. Aspire is so much more than a chance for a handicapped child to ride a horse. The connections that are made between kindred spirits is what is so important between all pets and

people, but this program is truly an inspiring testament to the amazing things that can happen when the human-animal bond is fostered.

Aspire has a fundraiser called Dances with Horses on September 24, 2011 at 7:00 at McElroy Auditorium in Waterloo. This is a night of music, choreographed dances with horses, trick riding performances and so much more. You can go to www.aspiretrp.org or www.danceswithhorses.org to get more information about how you can support the efforts of the Aspire program. Anyone who has a pet and understands the importance of the bond shared with that pet, should support the wonderful work done for our Cedar Valley kids through the Aspire Therapeutic Riding program.