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Moraga Horsemen's Junior Association to hold Hairy Horse Show

By Lou Fancher



Left to right: Amelia Roberts, Gabby Cirelli, Ellen Hann, Grace Carrick (on horse named Pixie), and Hanna Schoenberger Photo provided

says Heidi, admiring the kids' passion for riding. Although she herself is hesitant around horses, she has no such reservations about MJHA's value. Hanna, for her part, is long past the fear, and is focused: "One day, I'll be a lot better at it. Maybe I'll have my own horse," she says. For now, she rides a thoroughbred owned by another rider. She likes the feeling she gets from performing on a familiar animal and notes one reason: her favorite horse listens well. Her youthful enthusiasm alternates with a thoughtful, deliberate tone; a fascinating blend often heard when young athletes speak about their sport.

Beyond the social and psychological benefits derived from riding, families appreciate the affordable opportunity. MJHA members do not all own horses; it's common practice in the equestrian world to share or "lend" a horse for others' use. Club dues are low and parental involvement is high.

This year's Hairy Horse Show is open to all to observe, and riders with their own horses may participate in English and Western style classes. Hanna thinks it's a great intro to the MJHA because it's "a beginner and economical show."

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The Moraga Horsemen's Association (MHA) will be holding its annual May event, the Hairy Horse Show, on Saturday, May 8th.

Founded in the 1950's, the association's junior division (MJHA), allows riders ages eight through 18 to participate in shows, play days, and trail rides. "It's a hidden treasure in Moraga," says Heidi Schoenberger, whose daughter rides with the club. The MHA leases land from the East Bay Municipal Utility District: a two-acre arena and a 100 acre pasture with the capacity to board up to 17 horses. Members sign up to use the arena and may bring their trainers, or follow designated pasture trails with the proper supervision.

Junior club members gather once a month. After business matters are discussed, the meetings feature guest speakers, event planning, games and everything horses. Hanna Schoenberger, 13, has been riding since the age of six and is a member of MJHA. "I joined when my instructor, Wisti Nelson, suggested it to me," she said. "I'm glad I joined. I like being able to meet with friends every month." The young riders share a common bond, connecting with each other much as they do with the horses they ride.

Learning to control a large animal is empowering for young riders. "It boosts their confidence to take command of something so large,"