



Coming to Their Aid

Cardinal Hill Serves the Horse Community and Beyond

By Vickie Mitchell

Before jockey Michael Straight became an outpatient at Cardinal Hill Rehabilitation Hospital earlier this year, he knew little about the Lexington landmark or, for that matter, rehabilitation.

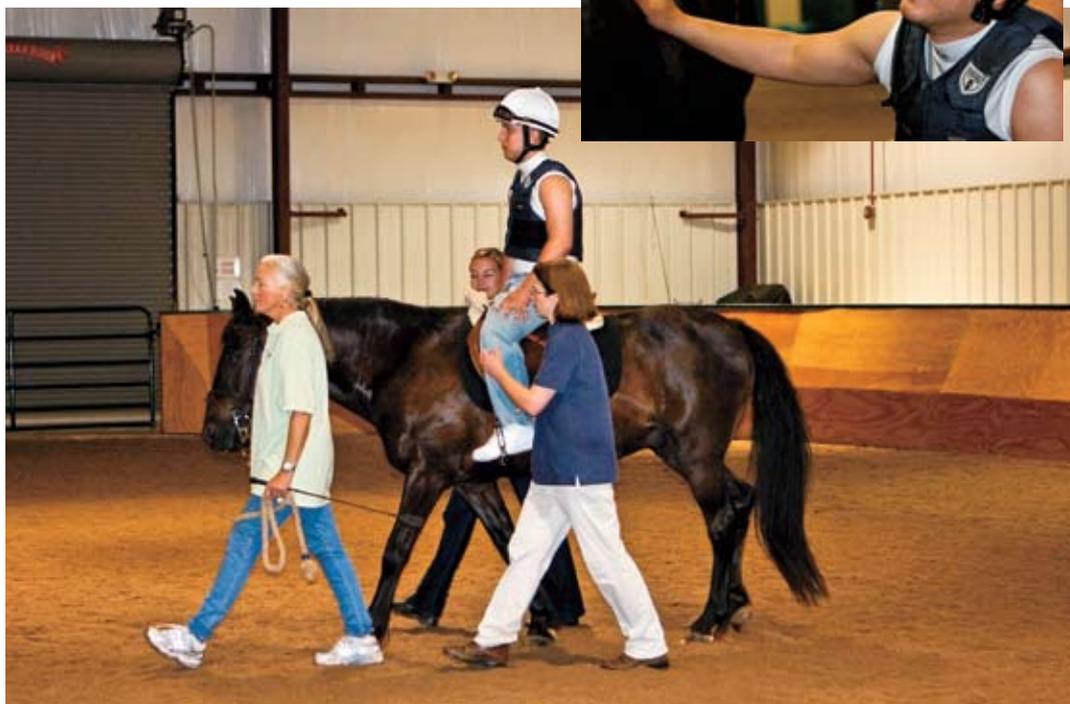
Straight's awareness was unexpectedly heightened after his mount fell during a race at Arlington Park near Chicago on Aug. 26, 2009. The 24-year-old jockey was seriously injured: his spinal cord partially severed and several vertebrae fractured.

This spring the New York native became an outpatient at Cardinal Hill, where he undergoes therapy three times a week in hopes of regaining his ability to walk.

Since the accident Straight has been treated at several rehabilitation hospitals, first in Chicago and this winter in Florida.

But it is at Cardinal Hill where Straight said he truly feels he is making strides as he walks on a treadmill using a revolutionary piece of robotics and rides on a Morgan horse named Chico during therapy sessions conducted at Central Kentucky Riding for Hope.

Part of his progress, he said, can be attributed to the facility and staff's understanding of the equine industry.



DAVID YOUNG PHOTOS

With therapist Linda Harris at his side, Michael Straight receives hippotherapy on Chico.

"I really think Cardinal Hill is awesome," said Straight. "In Chicago and Florida I felt like they didn't even know what jockeys were. Cardinal Hill is doing an unbelievable job, not just with me but with everyone there."

Straight is among 9,000 patients Cardinal Hill now serves each year, a number that will grow when an expansion is completed about a year from now. (See sidebar)

Some patients come from across Ken-

tucky; many, such as Straight, come from other states. And, like Straight, a number of patients have ties to horses.

"We see patients at this hospital at every level, from owners and people who work on the track to people who work on the farms or for industry associations," said Jenny Wurzback, director of community relations. "There is no question; the two are entwined."

The two Bluegrass stalwarts, the

CARDINAL HILL HOSPITAL



Cardinal Hill has long had close ties with the horse community.

equine industry and Cardinal Hill, are likely to become even more connected as the hospital works toward accreditation as a treatment center for those injured in riding accidents.

A conversation with Keeneland officials about a rehabilitation hospital for jockeys in Paris, France, piqued Cardinal Hill's interest in creating a similar facility, said Cardinal Hill president and CEO Kerry Gillihan.

"Not in this country was there a place like that," said Gillihan. "We are in the Bluegrass. So why wouldn't we be a (rehabilitative) center of excellence for not only jockeys but for riders of all kinds?"

Discussions are under way, and the hospital has pulled in representatives from organizations with Thoroughbred industry ties to develop the idea.

Adding an accredited center requires several new pieces of equipment, but it is clear, with Michael Straight's case being the most recent example, that the Cardinal Hill staff already has the rehabilitative know-how to work with jockeys and other riders.

"We know how to do it; so why wouldn't we?" Gillihan said. "It will happen."

In the meantime, Straight and other patients continue to benefit from Cardinal Hill's expertise. Twice each week Straight uses the Lokomat, a sophisticated robotic machine that not only allows him to walk but also gives him and his physical therapists feedback on his progress.

Cardinal Hill has the only Lokomat in a public institution in Kentucky.

Straight also benefits from Cardinal Hill's connections with Central Kentucky Riding for Hope, located at the Kentucky Horse Park, where he has hippotherapy — horse-assisted physical therapy — each Friday, riding for about 45 minutes under the direction and with the assistance of his Cardinal Hill therapists.

"Fridays can't get here soon enough," Straight said. "I can't believe I am back

on a horse. It is what my job was and what my life was, so it is like getting back to my old life."

Helping people return to their former lives after serious medical problems or accidents is Cardinal Hill's mission. "Hopefully, we are the last step, on the way back home," said Wurzbach.

Those in direct contact with horses aren't the only equine industry employees who have been touched by Cardinal Hill. Retiree Peter deCastro works in admissions during Keeneland's meets; he also helps with children's games at Breakfast with the Works.

In the past four years deCastro has been a Cardinal Hill patient twice, first, following knee replacement surgery in 2006, and then late last year after he suffered a minor stroke.

Stroke patients are the hospital's largest population; post-surgical therapy for joint replacements is expected to grow as more active athletic and aging baby boomers have the surgery.

Thanks to the therapy he received at



A patient receives therapy on the state-of-the-art Lokomat.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CARDINAL HILL HOSPITAL

Cardinal Hill and his own determination, deCastro said he “never missed a meet.” As further evidence of his recovery, he treated his wife of 50 years to a 13-day golden anniversary trip to Alaska this summer.

Cardinal Hill’s connections to the equine industry go beyond the patients it treats. Those in the industry have been crucial to the hospital’s fund-raising efforts. A prime example is Thoroughbred owner and breeder Mary Lou Whitney and her husband, John Hendrickson.

Mrs. Whitney is a long-time Cardinal Hill supporter — from the very beginning, she was on hand for the hospital’s annual telethon, her husband said, and the couple loyally continue to call in their pledge each year. They have made gifts to support the current expansion.

Their relationship with Cardinal Hill became more personal a few years ago, after Mrs. Whitney suffered a stroke. “When Mary Lou had her stroke, she



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CARDINAL HILL HOSPITAL

Marylou Whitney, center, and husband John Hendrickson, right, are hospital supporters. They are pictured with WKYT-TV’s Sam Dick, left, and hospital president Kerry G. Gillihan.

could have gone anywhere in the world to rehabilitate and she chose Cardinal Hill,” Hendrickson said.

He and Mrs. Whitney were impressed with Cardinal Hill and its staff through-out several years of outpatient therapy.

“You don’t know how good they are until you need them,” said Hendrickson. “Once you become a patient, you become a fan forever; they are that good.”

One of the hospital’s biggest fundrais-ing events, the Kentucky Bash, will be at

EXPANSION WILL ALLOW FOR MORE PATIENTS, SERVICES

The largest expansion in Cardinal Hill Rehabilitation Hospital’s history will mean room for more patients and more services. In operation for 60 years, the hospital will nearly double in size as a result of the \$47 million project, which includes a renovation of the current facility. The project should be completed by late spring or early summer, according to Kerry Gillihan, the hospital’s president and CEO.

For patients the most noticeable change will be in their rooms. The current 108-bed hospital has only two private rooms, which is out of step in the rehabilitation world. “The standard in the industry is private rooms,” said Gillihan.

The expansion will give the hospital 208 beds, with 114 of those in private rooms. As need grows, the hospital will be able to add 24 beds without additional construction.

Additional private rooms are important for several reasons, according to Gillihan. Families will be able to spend more comfortable time with patients, a critical aspect of Cardinal Hill’s family-centered rehabilitation. Private rooms are also needed for patients with serious infections.

The new rooms will be a bit larger and laid out more efficiently. Each will be equipped with an automated lift to make moving patients easier. Lifts also will be added to some existing rooms as those are remodeled.

Cardinal Hill’s physical expansion will also allow the facility to expand its services. Its sub-acute care unit at Good Samaritan Hospital, where patients who have had joint-replacement surgeries undergo in-patient

physical therapy, will be moved to the hospital.

A 20-bed ventilator-dependent unit, of which there are few in the state, will allow patients who have been on ventilators, sometimes for months in other hospitals, to move to Cardinal Hill. The move, in most cases, will allow patients to be weaned from the ventilator in a much shorter period.

“All the other hospitals will benefit,” said Gillihan.

The hospital now treats about 9,000 people a year, and as that number expands so will its patient-based research. Cardinal Hill began conducting research about four years ago, and its studies have gained the attention of medical professionals in other areas of the country.

“It is one thing to provide good care, but I think we also have the obligation to research and publish,” said Gillihan.



Cardinal Hill will nearly double in size.

a Thoroughbred farm this year. Don and Mira Ball have offered their Donamire Farm for the Sept. 10 event.

This spring the Cardinal Hill Junior Board, a new community group of 20-something movers and shakers, un-

ganizations with racing ties help fund projects. The Keeneland Foundation is a longtime supporter.

“Cardinal Hill is an extremely important part of our community and understands thoroughly the importance of the

Thoroughbred business in Central Kentucky,” Beasley said. “They have always been extremely helpful to those in the equine industry in terms of being there to assist in the rehabilitation of those who have been severely injured. In turn, the Thoroughbred community has been supportive of them.”

Horse farms also get into the act. A few years ago Darley Stud invited a group of Cardinal Hill patients to the farm for a tour and breakfast as part of the farm’s annual Alcibiades Day, where a charity is invited to the farm. The event is among the community outreach programs of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, who owns the farm.

Patients and their families had breakfast, saw the farm’s stallions, petted ponies, took a driving tour of the farm and left with bags of

gifts. The event “did wonders for all,” said Jimmy Bell, president of Darley USA, Darley’s American operation.

“It was neat to see how therapeutic horses can be,” added Katie LaMonica, the Darley marketing coordinator who planned the event.

Even the Keeneland race meet has ties to Cardinal Hill. At least twice each year, at spring and fall meets, a group of Cardinal Hill patients and their families go to the races at Keeneland.

It’s a Friday of fun and freedom but also therapy. Like other patient trips to the mall, bowling alley, or grocery store, a day at Keeneland helps patients work on physical and cognitive skills. But unlike other trips, it is considered more of a treat. “The fact that Keeneland is only open for a short amount of time in the spring and fall — it is like anticipating the Derby. You can go to the mall any time, but you can’t always go see the horses run,” said Linda Clark, a Cardinal Hill occupational therapist.

The outing is also a break from the confines of the hospital. “It lets that person know the world is still out there and that you can get out into the world,” said Wurzback.

Keeneland waives admissions fees for the group and makes arrangements for cars to drop off patients at the track entrance.

Negotiating Keeneland’s expansive grounds is a lesson for the wheelchair-bound patients. “It is quite the distance from the gate to the elevator, but it is a good training opportunity,” said Clark.

The day is full of challenges for patients — getting in and out of a vehicle, negotiating public bathrooms, maneuvering through crowds, even placing a bet, for those who are of age. Those who are recovering from brain injuries work on cognitive skills as they place orders at the snack bar, make change, or study the tote board.

“It is a fun outing, but it is also a working outing, from start to finish,” said Clark. “They don’t even realize they are working on as many areas as they are. We make it fun, but it is actually therapy. If they are enjoying it, they are more likely to participate, and the more they participate, the better they are going to get.” 🐾



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CARDINAL HILL HOSPITAL

Top, members of the Lexington Rotary Club take patients to Keeneland in 1970; above, Darley USA welcome patients to the farm, where they met the stallion Holy Bull.

dertook its first project, a benefit concert for the hospital. Several of its members have equine industry connections.

The Cardinal Hill board of directors has included members with industry ties, such as Rogers Beasley, Keeneland’s director of racing. Foundations and or-