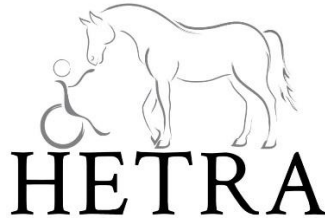


# HETRA Volunteer Handbook



HETRA's mission is to improve the quality of life both physically and emotionally of adults and children with disabilities through equine assisted activities.

**“Where horses and you make dreams come true!”**

Welcome to HETRA, also known as Heartland Equine Therapeutic Riding Academy. Volunteers are VERY valuable to us! Without dedicated volunteers most of the participants could not experience all of the benefits HETRA has to offer. Please feel free to send in any questions, or offer any comments you have on how the volunteer experience can be more enjoyable.

## **HETRA Staff Contact Information**

HETRA Office Phone – (402) 359-8830

### **Rachelle Tidwell, HETRA Volunteer Coordinator**

Cell Phone: (402) 669-1504 Email: [rtidwell@hetra.org](mailto:rtidwell@hetra.org)

Contact information for all HETRA staff can be found on the HETRA website at [www.HETRA.org](http://www.HETRA.org).

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# All About HETRA

Heartland Equine Therapeutic Riding Academy was started in 1989 by Steve and Janet Henthorn of Omaha. The program started with one participant, one horse, and three volunteers. It has grown significantly since 1989. HETRA now has 18 wonderful therapy horses, 19 PATH Int'l (Professional Association Certified Instructors, and serves over 130 participants per week. HETRA is a non-profit 501c3 organization, and is the first, and currently the only, PATH International Premier Accredited Center in Nebraska! HETRA offers services in Adaptive Riding, Hippotherapy, Adaptive Carriage Driving, and a Veterans program.

**Adaptive Riding** – the participant learns to control the horse and such skills as reining, use of leg and voice aids, and stable management. All adaptive riding sessions are conducted by a PATH International Certified Instructor and periodically reassessed by an occupational or physical therapist. Adaptive Riding sessions are conducted in a group setting with 2 to 3 participants riding at one time. All participants are accompanied by a leader and two sidewalkers if needed. Some participants progress to the point that they are able to ride independently.

**Therapy Services** – conducted by an Occupational, Physical, or Speech Therapist (OT, PT, ST) who has been specially trained in Hippotherapy to use the movement of the horse to facilitate improvements in their client. It does not teach the client how to ride the horse. Therapists use traditional techniques such as NDT (neurodevelopment treatment) and SI (sensory integration) along with the movement of the horse as part of their treatment strategy. All goals are therapy directed such as improving balance, coordination, posture, fine motor control, improving articulation, and increasing cognitive skills.

**Adaptive Carriage Driving** – offers participants the rewards of interaction and control of a horse while driving from a carriage seat. Using a horse and carriage gives participants an alternative or an addition to riding; opening up the world of horses to those who may be unable to ride due to weight, balance, fatigue, fear of height, the inability to sit astride a horse, or other issues. Adaptive Driving is all about imparting knowledge of safety, horses, harnessing, and driving skills for children and adults using teamwork. All Adaptive Driving sessions are conducted by a PATH International Certified Driving Instructor. It takes 3 to 5 volunteers to make one driving turn out possible!

**Veterans Program** – Veterans of any age and type of disability are encouraged to explore participation in this program. Specific precautions and contraindications to horseback riding will be addressed through a thorough evaluation by an occupational therapist to determine eligibility. The Veterans Program is designed to evaluate and provide opportunities for improvement physically, mentally, and socially for participants. Veterans will participate in 45 minute therapeutic sessions conducted by the HETRA Team. The HETRA Team consists of Veteran Volunteers (Horse Leader and Sidewalkers) PATH International Certified Riding Instructors, Occupational Therapists, and a Mental Health Therapist.

**Miniature Horse Camps** – HETRA is very excited to offer miniature horse camps throughout the summer each year! Participants complete grooming and leading activities as well as learning and craft stations as part of their camp experience. Camps are approximately 2 hours long and are generally held on Saturday's.

**Public Riding Lessons** – Riding lessons for the general public! These lessons have become popular with volunteers and the families of the participants.

Currently, riding sessions run Monday through Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday. The program currently operates year round from January through December.



# HETRA Volunteer Opportunities

HETRA has the following volunteer opportunities available:

*All Volunteers must be at least 12 years of age. All volunteers must demonstrate appropriate maturity and decision making ability for their volunteer duty.*

**Equipment/Toy Assistant:** This volunteer is a minimum of 12 years old. The Equipment Assistant is responsible for assisting the instructor with retrieving equipment that may be needed in the arena. They also assist with many of the games and activities that the participants participate in.

**Sidewalker:** This person walks next to the participant and assist with balance and exercises. All Sidewalkers must be at least 14 years of age. This person must be able to comfortably walk and jog next to a horse while supporting a participant. Tall sidewalkers are 5'8" or taller and are designated to walk with those participants that need additional support or ride the taller horses.

**Schedule Keeper:** This volunteer is responsible for keeping sessions on schedule. Schedule Keepers will assist with directing volunteers to the correct areas and assist with assigning additional tasks to extra volunteers. All Schedule Keepers must be at least 18 years of age.

***HETRA offers additional trainings for those interested in these volunteer opportunities:***

**Grooming/Tacking:** These volunteers are responsible for assisting the Barn Leader in grooming and completing tack changes on the horses. Those interested in becoming a Groomer/Tacker must pass a proficiency test prior to participation as a Groomer/Tacker. Groomers must be a minimum of 12 years old – Tackers a minimum of 14 years old.

**Horse Leader:** This person is responsible for leading the horse during the session. All horse leaders must have volunteered for a minimum of 16 hours and have successfully passed Grooming/Tacking training before going through a horse leader skill training. They must pass a proficiency test prior to participation as a horse leader. All horse leaders must be at least 14 years of age. We have three levels of horse leaders, Blue, Gold and Platinum.

**Barn Leader:** Responsible for all activities in the barn area including: bringing horses in and out of pens, working with Groomers/Tackers to get horses groomed and tacked with appropriate tack prior to the next lesson, checking over tack before the horse is taken to the arena, making sure horses and tack are put away and that barn is cleaned for the night. Barn Leaders are individually selected by HETRA Instructors and Staff after becoming proficient as a Groomer/Tacker and Horse Leader.

**Lunger:** Volunteers must be at least 14 years of age and a trained Horse Leader. These volunteers can receive additional training to be able to lunge/exercise horses in preparation for sessions.

**Barn Maintenance/Assistance:** Volunteer of at least 12 years old that will assist with barn maintenance such as stall cleaning, sweeping, cleaning waters, and mowing during weekly scheduled shifts outside of regular HETRA Sessions. These activities will be completed under the direct supervision of a HETRA Staff Member.

**Volunteer Committee:** Meets one time per month and assist in volunteer retention, recognition, and training. Assists to plan the volunteer and participants awards party.

**Administrative Assistant:** Help with general administrative duties of the organization including filing, typing, newsletters, and mailings.

**Special Events:** These individuals help with special event duties including set up and clean up as well as providing support prior to the events with advertising and soliciting auction or raffle items. They also assist during the events.



## **HETRA Safety Rules for All HETRA Staff, Volunteers, Families, And Participants**

*The following guidelines have been developed for your safety. Please follow all rules while at this facility.*

*Failure to follow these rules can result in your dismissal from the HETRA facility.*

1. Please DO NOT pet the horses in any outside pens or indoor stalls. Some horses on the property are privately owned and are not part of the HETRA herd.
2. Please do not arrive at the barn before you are scheduled. There must be a HETRA Instructor, Staff Member, or Barn Leader on site when volunteers, participants, or guests arrive. For insurance purposes there cannot be visitors at the HETRA facility when there is not a staff member on site.
3. Do NOT enter a stall or outside pen unless asked to do so by a HETRA Staff Member or Barn Leader.
4. ONLY the Barn Leader or certified Horse Leader will be allowed to get horses from outside pens.
5. No individual should enter a pen with a loose horse in it.
6. You should not be in any outside pens UNLESS you have been asked by an Instructor or Barn Leader to complete a specific task in this area. Once this has been completed please return to the proper volunteer areas.
7. NEVER sit, kneel, or lay on the ground near a horse.
8. All phones must be turned to silent or vibrate when in the barn.
9. Please only use HETRA tack and equipment and always return it to its appropriate place.
10. Always clean up after yourself and any horse you are working with (sweep up any hair, manure, etc and throw away any trash).
11. All participants during a HETRA riding session are required to wear approved safety helmets (this includes Instructors).
12. Please do not feed any horses treats. Treating horses tends to promote biting. Also some horses are on special diets and treats can be detrimental to their health. Please do not allow horses to lick your hands, this encourages biting. Please DO NOT pet the horses on their heads or faces, this is a personal space for them and can make them crabby.
13. When approaching a horse, always consider the horse's limited field of vision. Horses cannot see directly behind or in front of them without moving their head. Always approach a horse at the shoulder, speak to them as you approach, and then extend your hand and pat them on the neck or shoulder. When moving around a horse, placing a hand on their hip as you move around them allows them to know where you are.
14. Avoid sudden movements when around the horse. This includes removing coats, raising arms suddenly, running, jumping, climbing, etc. Horses can spook easily, please keep this in mind at all times when around horses.
15. Please DO NOT reach into or pet a horse through the bars. If they can put their heads out it is ok to pet them. Please respect that they may need down time and do not want to be petted.
16. Only HETRA Instructors are allowed to put bridles on the HETRA horses.
17. Please do not bring dogs or any other animals to the barn (If you have a service animal please notify HETRA Staff).
18. The cats are cute and fun to play with but remember they can bite and scratch. Playing with cats is done at your own risk. Please monitor any children during their interaction with the cats.
19. All children under the age of 12 must be DIRECTLY monitored by an adult at all times while on the property.
20. DO NOT enter any other buildings on the property unless directed by a HETRA Instructor or Staff Member.
21. If you are not directly involved with a session please keep all activities and conversations to the designated waiting areas or check with the Barn Leader or Schedule Keeper as to additional tasks that need to be done around the barn. It is important to keep noise and conversation to a minimum when lessons are being conducted as it can be very distracting for the participants and horses.
22. The session Instructor is ultimately responsible for all aspects of the session from the time the first horse is taken out until the last one is put away. Please listen and follow all directions given by the session Instructor. Please be aware of all situations around you and report any unsafe situations to the session Instructor or Barn Leader immediately.

**HETRA Volunteer & Guest Dismissal Policy:** HETRA reserves the right to dismiss a guest or volunteer from the facility and from the program if their behavior is putting themselves, a participant, staff, other volunteer, or horse's mental or physical health in jeopardy. The HETRA Instructor in charge at the time of the incident will review the behavior with the individual and determine the level of intervention necessary. The level of intervention could include verbal or written warning or immediate dismissal from the HETRA facility and program. Physical, emotional, mental, or sexual abuse by a person at the HETRA facility will not be tolerated and will result in immediate dismissal from the HETRA facility. Alcohol consumption by a volunteer prior to a session is not allowed. A volunteer smelling of alcohol will not be allowed to assist with that night's session.

**The rules are in place for everyone's safety. Please follow these rules at all times while at the facility.  
Anyone not following these rules will be asked to leave the facility.**



# Volunteer Frequently Asked Questions

## 1. *What type of time commitment do I need to make to HETRA?*

In order to maximize the benefit to the participants for each lesson HETRA strives to create a leader and Sidewalker team for each participant. It is very important to the progress of the participant that this team stay consistent. Volunteers are asked to commit to at least one 2-4 hour time slot per week. Volunteers are welcome to continue to volunteer on an ongoing basis.

## 2. *What if I can't make a weekly commitment?*

If you are unable to make a weekly commitment but would still like to volunteer, we are always looking for substitute volunteers. Sub volunteers fill in when a regularly scheduled volunteer is unable to make it to their shift. Please let us know if you are interested in being on the sub list and your availability. Volunteers from this list will be contacted as substitutes are needed.

## 3. *What if I can't make it to my scheduled volunteer session?*

If you are unable to attend your scheduled volunteer session please fill out the cancellation form located on the HETRA website under the volunteer tab. Please notify us at least 24 hours in advance to allow time to make other arrangements. If you are unable to notify us 24 hours in advance please call the volunteer coordinator, as well as filling out a cancellation form. The more notice we are given when cancelling will enable us to find a substitute to fill your spot.

Your job as a volunteer is very important to HETRA and the participants. If a volunteer fails to show up for a scheduled time, a HETRA participant may not be able to ride and therefore miss out on their valuable session. So PLEASE notify us if you are unable to attend your scheduled volunteer time!

## 4. *What should I wear to the barn?*

Please wear enclosed shoes such as tennis shoes or boots. Volunteers need to avoid wearing loose clothing that could get caught on a participant or saddle or that would make a lot of noise such as a wind breaker. Please keep in mind that you will be around horses and walking/jogging in deep sand, comfortable shoes are recommended. Please avoid dangling jewelry and excessive perfume or cologne. Please dress in a manner that is appropriate to a family oriented public place and demonstrates a good image for HETRA.

## 5. *What is HETRA's policy on severe weather?*

Sessions are occasionally canceled due to poor road conditions, extreme cold heat advisory, or a tornado warning. You will be individually notified via text message in the case of any cancellation, weather related or otherwise. All holiday cancellations will be posted on the HETRA website calendar, as well as emailed to all volunteers.



# When You Arrive At The Barn

**Parking:** When you arrive and park at the barn, please leave the parking in front of the building for the participants. You may park anywhere along the posts/chain parking areas. Please not block any of the doorways.

**Barn Entry:** Enter the lounge to collect your name tag. Then proceed to the East side of the barn and enter through the walk in door. Please watch for horse traffic that may be heading to the arenas or into stalls. Horses and participants have the right of way.

## **Before The First Participant Lesson Of The Day:**

- Find your name tag in the correct drawer in the lounge.
- Assist with sweeping and cleaning the lounge, bathrooms, and barn aisleway.
- Pick out the arena and assist with putting the arena divider up.
- Set up the arena – ask the Instructor how it needs to be set up with toys and equipment.
- Barn Leader and Horse Leaders bring in all horses needed for the session.
- Barn Leader, Instructors, and designated Horse Leaders lunge horses.
- Horse Leaders and Groomers groom horses.
- Barn Leaders, Horse Leaders, and Groomers have horses tacked 15 minutes before each lesson.
- Horse Leaders take horses to the arena for warm ups 15 minutes prior to each lesson.

## **During And Between Participant Lessons:**

- Assist with setting out tack for upcoming lessons.
- Assist with tacking horses in time for the next lesson (if you are a trained Groomer)
- Keep the arena free of any manure during lessons.
- Clean helmets, tack, and toys (if time allows).
- Fill outside water tanks (if time allows).
- Pick out stalls as needed.
- Sweep as needed.

## **After Last Participant Lesson:**

- Pick up all toys and equipment and put in proper places.
- Take down the arena divider.
- Make sure all tack has been returned to its correct place.
- Be sure all grooming supplies are back in the correct place.
- Final sweep of the barn if needed.
- Barn Leader, Instructors, and Horse Leaders – make sure all horses are returned to their stalls/pens.
- Ask Barn Leader or Instructors what else needs to be done.



# What To Expect During Lessons

## **Mounting:**

The Horse Leader will lead the horse up to the mounting block when the Instructor and participant are ready. Sidewalkers are responsible for assisting the Instructor in the mounting process. The sidewalker on the right side of the horse will assist in the mount (the Instructor will always be the one to mount and dismount the participant). The left hand sidewalker will take over for the Instructor after the mount has been completed.

## **The Lesson:**

Once the mount is completed, the Horse Leader will lead the horse away from the mounting block and wait for directions from the Instructor. The Horse Leader needs to remain focused on leading the horse, keeping the correct spacing from other horses, and listening for instructions for the Instructor. Equipment People will assist in the arena for many of the games and activities that the participants will participate in.

Sidewalkers are asked and encouraged to interact with the participant during many games and activities. Please speak one at a time so as not to overwhelm the participant. Please remember that the Instructor is the one who should be instructing the participant and that you are providing assistance to the participant as needed. Both sidewalkers are responsible for assisting the participant with balance and follow through on exercises. It is very important that participants are allowed to do for themselves as much as possible and only assist them when asked by the Instructor.

As a sidewalker, you are responsible for the safety of the participant throughout the riding session. Please notify the Instructor regarding any health or behavioral problems the participant may experience. Sidewalkers must be capable of walking and jogging with one or both arms at or above shoulder level to assist with support of the participant. Sidewalkers should be capable of keeping up with the speed of the horse and walking and jogging in sand. If, at any time, a sidewalker does not feel comfortable, please notify an Instructor.

## **Dismounting:**

The Horse Leader will listen to instructions from the Instructor as to where to go for the dismount. The left sidewalker will drop off when the Instructor takes over. The right hand sidewalker will assist with the dismount.

## **Emergency Situations:**

When dealing with horses and participants, emergencies can happen. In an emergency situation it is most important for everyone to stay calm. Any yelling or sudden movements can make the situation worse. If an emergency dismount is necessary, the left hand sidewalker will complete an emergency dismount only if the Instructor cannot get to the participant in time. If there is another type of emergency, such as fire or tornado warning, the Instructor will refer to HETRA's emergency action plan.



# When You Meet A HETRA Participant

A person with disabilities wants to be treated like everyone else. Each person has his or her own learning rate, style of learning, unique personality, and temperament. HETRA strives to provide an enriched experience and a favorable environment in which to learn and grow.

HETRA serves a variety of participants including children and adults with disabilities such as cerebral palsy, spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, vision or hearing impairment, cystic fibrosis, brain tumors, head injuries, autism, down syndrome, development delays, stroke, spinal cord injuries, or brain injuries. Here is how you can help make their time with HETRA a wonderful experience!

- Be yourself when you meet a person with a disability. Talk about the same things you would with anyone else; i.e. work, school, special interests, hobbies, etc.
- Help the participant ONLY when they request it or the Instructor asks us to. It is important that they are as independent as possible for their confidence level as well as to receive the most out of their therapy time.
- Be patient. Let the participant set his or her own pace of walking, talking, etc.
- Don't be afraid to LAUGH WITH THE PARTICIPANT! Please enjoy your time at HETRA!
- Don't stare when you see a person with a disability. They deserve the same respect as any person should receive.
- Don't make judgments before getting to know them. You may be surprised!
- ENJOY yourself and your friendship with the participants. Their philosophies and good humor may give you inspiration!
- If you are uncomfortable working with someone with disabilities or a particular participant you may want to assist in other areas that do not have direct contact with the participant. Always feel free to voice any concerns to the Instructors or Volunteer Coordinator.

HETRA participants benefit from adaptive riding, carriage driving, or hippotherapy in a variety of ways. The rhythmic motion of the horse at the walk helps to relax tight, spastic muscles. Sitting on the horse encourages participants to hold themselves up straight and tall which strengthens neck and trunk muscles. Riding stretches hip and thigh muscles and improves balance. Interaction with the Instructor helps participants follow directions, extend their attention span, and work on concepts such as steering right and left. Interaction with the horse allows the participant to develop a bond with the animal which improves self-esteem and builds confidence. Each participant rides for approximately 30 minutes one time per week. Most participants are assisted by a Horse Leader and two Sidewalkers throughout their session as well as their Instructor or Occupational or Physical Therapist. The Instructors and Therapists monitor the progress of each participant throughout their participation in the program. They also assist the participant or participant's family with setting goals that they work on achieving during their time at the barn.





# Volunteer Incentives

HETRA could not function without the dedicated volunteers who help run the program every day!  
HETRA's way of thanking you for all that you do is through the incentive program.

## Volunteer Recognition Party

Once a year, HETRA and families host an end of the year Volunteer Appreciation and Participant Awards Party.

At this event, the HETRA staff get a chance to thank all of you for all of the hard work you have put in throughout the year. Please keep a record (log book provided in the lounge) of how many hours you volunteered outside of your regularly scheduled shifts (barn clean up, committee meetings etc.). These hours all add together to create your total hours for the year. Participants' parents and caregivers donate items to the volunteer silent auction. Here you can use your HETRA hours to bid on these wonderful items! There is also an awards ceremony where volunteers are recognized, including Volunteers of the Year! HETRA participants are also recognized with special awards for all of their hard work throughout the year. This is a really fun event for everyone to come together and reflect on all of the good times that have been had and amazing work that has been done!

## Purchasing HETRA Merchandise

HETRA has a supply of HETRA T-Shirts, Sweatshirts, etc that you can exchange your volunteer hours for. T-Shirts are 15 hours, Long Sleeved Shirts are 18 hours, Crew Sweatshirts are 20 hours and Hooded Sweatshirts are 25 hours. Hats are also available for 15 hours. You can use a maximum of 100 hours on HETRA merchandise each year.

\*\*Unused volunteer hours do not transfer year to year. They do expire after the Volunteer Appreciation Party. Hours cannot be transferred to another volunteer.

**Every hour you donate makes a difference in the life of a very special HETRA Participant. Thank you for all of your hard work and dedication! HETRA could not exist without you!**



## **Other Ways To Help HETRA**

Here are a few other ways to help this organization grow!

### **HETRA and the United Way**

HETRA is considered a qualified nonaffiliated agency with United Way. To designate your contribution you will need to list us on your donation form under Section C. Please include HETRA's name and address below:

Heartland Equine Therapeutic Riding Academy  
10130 S. 222<sup>nd</sup> St  
Gretna NE 68028  
402-359-8830

### **Employer Assistance**

Large employers often offer grant programs to organizations with whom their employees also volunteer their time with or have foundations which help support nonprofits. Some employers also offer a matching donation program in which they will match your donations or will make a donation once you have completed a set number of volunteer hours with an organization. Lastly, many companies will host "casual or jeans days" to benefit a nominated organization. If you become aware of a program like this with your employer and would like to see HETRA become the beneficiary, please contact Jodi at [jodi@hetra.org](mailto:jodi@hetra.org) or (402) 699-0937.

### **HETRA Merchandise**

HETRA offers items such as T-shirts, Long Sleeved T-Shirts, Sweatshirts, Hoodies, Hats, etc. for sale. Prices, sizes, and colors are listed on the HETRA website. If you are interested in purchasing any of these items, please contact Erin at [erin@hetra.org](mailto:erin@hetra.org) or (402) 677-5986.

### **Sponsorships**

HETRA is always in need of horse or participant sponsors. HETRA never turns a participant away for inability to pay for a session. As a result HETRA supplements more than \$75 per ride per participant in order to keep sessions affordable for the participants. An individual or company can sponsor a participant for a week, month, or year. Another large cost is the feed and care for the herd of therapy horses. Horse sponsorships can be for a week, month, or year. Yearly sponsors have their names listed on a sign on the horses stall.

### **Amazon Smile**

When shopping on Amazon, enter their site through Amazon Smile and choose HETRA as your non-profit of choice. A portion of your purchase will be donated back to HETRA.

### **Karat Club**

The Karat Club is a way to give to the participant sponsorship program on a monthly basis. Join at the 10, 25, 50, or 100 Karat Level! All club members are listed on the website, receive quarterly newsletters, a pin designating you as a Karat Club donor for the year, and most importantly, you make a difference in the life of HETRA participants!

**Additional information about any of these programs and many more ways to help, can be found on the HETRA website ([www.hetra.org](http://www.hetra.org)) under "You Can Help"!**