



PHOTO BY STEPHEN WALKER

# heart to heart

*Campbell's Lane Farm offers healing experiences with their horses*

BY AMELIA BLADES STEWARD

**“I would not be who I am today** if it were not for horses,” says Anne Altvater of Campbell's Lane Farm in Preston.

She explains that as a child, horses were her sounding board, helping her filter experiences so that she could focus on what was good and healthy. Some of her favorite solitude time growing up was riding with her pony, miles away from home.

Altvater credits her relationship with these four-legged healers as making her who she is today — a skilled horsewoman, an award-winning riding instructor, a compassionate energy healer, and an intuitive equine therapy practitioner.

While teaching others to ride she became aware of how horses can become part of the healing process. She found during the riding lessons that she and the horses were helping people develop life and coping skills.

“When you get around a horse, it filters your energy system, like an oil filter. Research shows that being in the presence of a horse results in a sense of peace and well-being, and produces positive physical benefits, such as reduced blood pressure and heart rate. Horses are very much in the present moment, where all things are possible,” stated Altvater.

In 1999, Altvater moved from Florida, where she had taught riding lessons, back to her grandparents' farm in Preston. She went into business with Jenn

Fox to provide traditional riding lessons on the farm. As the business grew, the two received recognition in the ring. Altvater graduated from the Barbara Brennan School of Healing in 2003 and added individual healing sessions to her offerings. After Altvater completed Shore Leadership in 2018, she became inspired to do more with her business.

“Chasing the blue ribbon wasn't as important to me anymore,” she said.

Through decades of working with children and adults, Altvater has seen that much more goes on in the ring than just a riding lesson.

“Horses offer self-awareness. They mirror what people need to see and hear. I have witnessed the insights that people experience when they come face to face and heart to heart with the horse,” she added.

She began offering healing sessions using her horses to help people make breakthroughs that may not be available in the four walls of traditional therapy. Her clients experience greater self-awareness, emotional well-being, physical healing, as well as problem-solving and personal growth. Clients can be self-referred or referred from a therapist, social worker, or other healthcare practitioner.

“People will notice something they see in the horse which reflects something about themselves. In this heart-centered environment I help my clients interpret their interactions with the horses so that they can find



ABOVE: Jenn Fox, Anne Altvater and Nicki Swann, the team at Campbell's Lane Farm.

ABOVE CENTER: The new therapy ring building where Annette Flammia and Taylor, the horse (shown far right) are having a therapy session.

insights and creative solutions," she commented. "People tell me that these transformational moments at the farm have lasting effects long after a session is over."

As a writer, I decided I needed to experience firsthand what Altvater offers. My first experience was with Taylor, a beautiful flea-bitten grey Welsh Cob. It was a rainy, cold day outside. The session began with a conversation with Altvater sitting in director's chairs near a gas-lit fire pit in the farm's new indoor arena built in 2019. I felt as if I was in a spa-like environment awaiting a massage.

Altvater explained that no riding was involved during a session and I could get as close to Taylor as I wanted under her supervision. I have to admit, I am afraid of horses, so when it came time to go into the ring with Taylor, I was a bit apprehensive. Altvater asked what I was feeling.

In those still moments, I got emotional watching

Taylor moving gracefully around the ring — the power, strength, and grace in her movements. I shared I was having a hard time juggling things — with work, COVID-19 stressors, and family obligations. As we began processing some of my feelings, Taylor came and stood close behind me — a position she had not assumed before with me in the ring. In that suspended time, Altvater explained that Taylor was metabolizing my energy field.

The second time Taylor stood behind me, I turned around and faced her. As I did, it looked as if the air cleared and a veil was lifted. Altvater also noticed that my energy field had shifted. I felt as if I was given clarity and shown the possibility in that moment. This time, Taylor laid her head on my shoulder before walking off. We connected in a moment of gratitude.

As I went to process the experience with Altvater outside the ring, Taylor wasn't finished with what she

wanted to tell me. As we discussed some of the challenges, including my lack of free time and fun of late, Taylor began playing with a large ball in the ring, pushing it around with her hoof. Altvater shared that she had never seen Taylor do this. She stated, "Horses ask us to surrender to the moment — surrendering to the information they have for us."

My takeaway from the session that day was that Taylor was helping me process my burdens. I believed as she stood behind me, she was revealing to me that people were standing in the wings to help with my workload and as she pushed the ball across the ring, she was inviting me to introduce more play into my work-driven life.

I asked Altvater what makes a horse so intuitive. She replied, "Through millions of years of evolution horses have become hard-wired to survive by sensing what is around them with acute

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accuracy. These instincts keep the horse safe and let them determine how to act in their best interest. This same keen awareness allows them to respond to the inner lives of people they encounter in a healing session.”

“We humans tend to define ourselves by our roles, professions, beliefs, and experiences. We obsess about the past and worry about the future. Horses see through to our hearts where insights arise when we pay attention to what these healers show us,” she added.

As Altvater has gone broader with the scope of her work, Campbell's Lane Farm has added a variety of other healing services. She and Jenn Fox, who has a degree in early childhood development, began offering child-focused farm experiences. Fox guides children through activities that include horse grooming, feeding and walking; farm play and chores; and other activities that develop balance, fine motor skills, core strength, and flexibility. The sessions can address

children with autism or cerebral palsy, sensory processing difficulties, and mental, emotional or physical conditions.

Leader development programs are offered to corporate business executives, nonprofits leadership teams, and groups from other organizations, to help create self-awareness through team-building and problem-solving exercises. Leader development is also customized for youth groups and teens. Campbell's Lane Farm also offers Innovative Horsemanship, a program offered to individuals or



ABOVE: A group of social workers enjoy a team building activity at Campbell's Lane Farm.

INSET: Jenn Fox works with children through the child-focused farm program.

ABOVE RIGHT: Ashley Meissner and Jozi Cross read aloud to Pogo the donkey.

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groups, through Altvater and Caroline Lundgren, a certified Natural Horsemanship Instructor who lives in the Turks and Caicos Islands. The transformative “in the moment” experience helps riders become better by developing more effective relationships with the horses they ride.

Nicki Swann, a riding instructor at Campbell's Lane Farm, uses her flair for fun to create learning experiences for both youth and adults. Swann wrote, produced and directed the farm's first fundraiser, the mystery dinner show “D-Taned: A Wild

**CAMPBELL'S LANE FARM**  
 22862 Dover Bridge Road  
 Preston, MD 21673  
 410-310-8033  
 campbellslanefarm.com

West Bank Robbery,” which raised over \$4,000 for the Maryland Food Bank. She also creates themed holiday and birthday parties and fun-raisers for local nonprofits; week-long summer camps for children ages five to 10; and day camps during the school year. Swann is writing a series of children's books with inspiring themes that will be published soon.

“Campbell's Lane Farm is a place where anything is possible. That is why I get up every day,” Altvater reflected. ●