

COLUMN

# A new year gallops in at Equine Spirit Sanctuary



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**Courtesy photo**

**Kat, one of the therapeutic riding horses, enjoys a drink of heated water on a cold, snowy Saturday (Jan. 5).**

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## **By Ruth Bourgeois For The Taos News**

The new year started off at Equine Spirit Sanctuary (ESS) with our annual meeting, held Saturday (Jan. 19). This meeting serves to provide a summary of the prior year's activities and to announce the current year's plans and projects.

A summary of the meeting is posted on the ESS website, [equinespiritsanctuary.org](https://www.equinespiritsanctuary.org) (<https://www.equinespiritsanctuary.org/>), on the "News" page.

Since its inception in 2005, ESS has been home to over 80 equines - horses, donkeys, miniature horses and ponies. Most of these were either rescues or unwanted horses. Some of the equines who find their way to ESS are rehabbed and start a new life as a program horse, such as a therapeutic riding horse.

Training a horse for this program is the most difficult, requiring the horse to do all the basic as well as advanced skills, such as responding to the handler's voice commands and body language. The horses must be steadfast and calm with lots of activity going on around them, like stuffed toys flying overhead while the rider plays games of catch with volunteers on the ground, working on the horses' eye-hand coordination and agility. The horses must be patient, and, above all, sound for the work required. A good therapeutic riding horse is the most valuable part of our program.

Other horses that may not be suitable for riding can still find their niche as an equine-assisted learning and therapy program horse. This program is mostly unmounted work, so horses of all ages and all sizes can participate as long as they have the required aptitude and temperament. Many of our rescues become wonderful therapy horses. They seem to understand the connection between hurting and healing.

This year, ESS will be offering more equine-assisted therapy opportunities, with a therapist that will be on staff. Watch for more information on this exciting news. Along with that huge addition, ESS will be hosting a Masterson Method® equine bodywork clinic designed specifically for professionals working in the equine-assisted therapy field in June.

This winter has been a bit of a challenge with the cold and snowy conditions. Our horses are eating more and working less. But spring will be here soon enough and it will be time to prepare for the busy summer months. Volunteers are always needed and welcomed.

Along with the program horses, there are also several horses who live at ESS that are permanently retired and also a few special horses that are available for adoption. The public is welcome to come out and meet our horses and learn more about our programs and educational opportunities.

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Equine Spirit Sanctuary is open for visitors and volunteers on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Please remember that ESS follows the same criteria as Taos schools and government offices. If there are delays or closures due to the weather, ESS is also closed or will open later that day.

*For more information, call Ruth at (575) 758-1212 or visit our Facebook page Equine Spirit Sanctuary.*