

## That Country Up North

By Sandra Verda

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The truth is, we really don't live in igloos, there isn't snow on the ground all year round, and dog sleds are not our main mode of transportation. We do not all say "Eh" after every sentence!

Canada is really quite civilized and we even have therapeutic riding programs! Canada has a population of approximately 30 million people spread out across ten provinces and three territories. There are approximately 880,000 horses in our nation. In the western most province, British Columbia, there are approximately 113,000 horses, 12% of the national total. In Langley, which is considered the horse capital of British Columbia, there are over 25,000 horses.

According to current statistics of the Canadian Therapeutic Riding Association (CanTRA), there are 80 member programs, serving over 5,500 riders across the country. CanTRA, established in 1980, is the national sports organization for therapeutic riding in Canada. It is a non-profit organization providing support to individuals and groups in the therapeutic riding industry through education, certification and insurance. They offer three levels of certification for instructors and coaches, as well as continuing education opportunities for therapeutic riding professionals. CanTRA's certification system was modeled after Equine Canada's (formerly Canadian Equestrian Federation) certification program for coaches in equestrian disciplines, including Dressage, Combined Training, Hunter/Jumper, and Western. Equine Canada's certification process produces well-rounded, capable instructors in the areas of lungeing, riding on the flat and over fences, stable management, first aid and most importantly, teaching with an emphasis on safety and effectiveness. Both Equine Canada and CanTRA certifications are 2-3 day on-site processes that include written, riding, lunging, stable management and teaching components. All candidates must participate in a technical evaluation process to determine whether or not they are ready to attend an actual exam.

## The Best of Both Worlds

Pacific Riding for the Disabled Association in Langley, British Columbia, is a NARHA Premier Accredited Center and educational facility for therapeutic riding professionals and elite equestrian athletes. PRDA focuses on incorporating both NARHA and CanTRA standards in all aspects of its program. PRDA operates year round, currently serves 130 riders per week and continues to expand. Diverse programs are provided, and range from direct therapy conducted by Physiotherapists with children ages 3 to 6, to advanced level sport riders competing for positions on the Canadian Team and aspiring to compete at the Paralympics. Combining the policies and procedures set forth by NARHA and CanTRA they provide safe, fun and effective programs in an accessible environment that promotes student success, independence and teamwork.

Instructor training courses emphasize both NARHA and CanTRA standards, and provide instructor candidates tools to prepare for both organizations' certification processes.

### International Teamwork

All of us know how essential teamwork is in therapeutic riding. Just as in the US, volunteers, instructors and horses have to cooperate during each and every lesson. Center boards and staff work together to develop strategic plans. Volunteers and staff organize fund-raisers together. Farriers and veterinarians work together to ensure happy, healthy horses. In the same vein, national and international therapeutic riding organizations should work together to provide educational opportunities and growth in the industry. Finding out about each other and communicating is the first step to joint ventures.

Canada is a big country. We have many things in common with the US, yet retain our unique culture(s) and a world view that is sometimes a little different from that held by Americans. We are happy to be Canadian.

The opportunity for exchange and teamwork is endless and I encourage all of us to explore the different avenues of education, and tap into the many therapeutic riding organizations around the world. We live in a time of globalization, when people travel freely and ideas are conveyed at the click of a mouse. At your center, teamwork may start in the arena, but our international team can be even more effective for riders with disabilities in all parts of the world. All we have to do is work together. Eh?

*Portions of this article have been reprinted courtesy of CanTRA.*

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