



## Magistrates as “Side Walkers” and More at Vail Meadows

By Magistrate Ann Weatherhead  
*Cuyahoga County Domestic Relations Court*



*The OAM Magistrates at Vail Meadows equestrian riding center, Oregon, Ohio.*

**T**he 2011 Spring OAM volunteer project was at Vail Meadows, an equestrian riding center in Oregon Ohio, located about two miles from Maumee Bay State Park, where this year’s Spring Conference was held. Vail Meadows offers recreational riding for people with disabilities. Their instructors are all certified by the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA.)

Our volunteers served as “side walkers.” Two of us at a time walked beside the horse, and helped hold the rider in place in the saddle, as a Vail Meadows staff person led the horse around the arena. In addition to

walking and trotting the horses in the arena, (we left the “side running” to the experts!) the riders did a series of upper body exercises, placed rings on posts, and put objects in a basket. These classes help people of all ages and abilities gain confidence and a sense of accomplishment as they develop balance and leg strength.

All of the women at Vail Meadows seem to have “Joy” in their names. One of the “Joys” told us the stories of several riders and the ways in which the riding classes helped them surmount significant obstacles, including a person who had to use a wheelchair

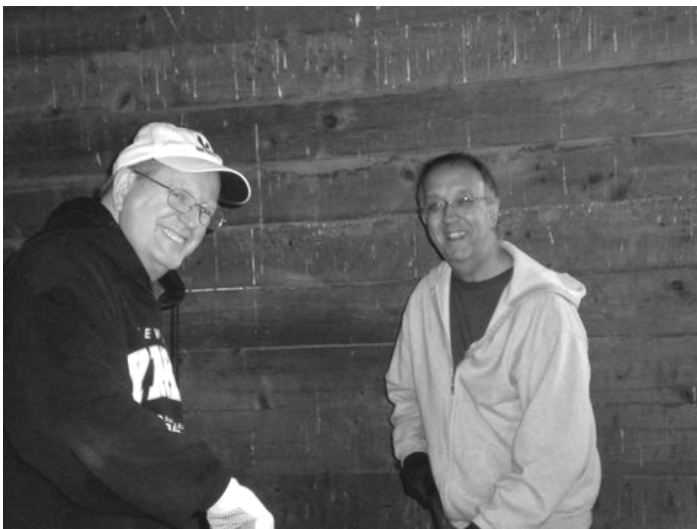
initially, and after participating in the equine therapy classes, was ultimately able to walk unassisted.

Outwardly, the volunteer project at Vail Meadows seems that it could hardly have been more different from last spring's project at MedWish Ohio. This year we were in a rural farm environment in Oregon, Ohio, where there are 646 people per square mile, and our work was, quite literally, "hands on." The people we were assisting were right there. At MedWish we were in a warehouse in the city of Cleveland where there are 5,560 people per square mile, and we packed supplies that would be sent around the globe to be used by people we would never see.

There is a similarity of purpose, however. With both the Vail Meadows project and the MedWish project, and with our fall, 2010 project at the Mid-Ohio Foodbank, we spent a little of our time putting our



*Photo above: Magistrates Bill Rickrich and George Reynolds  
Photo below: Chief Magistrate Greg Clifford*



*Photo above: Magistrates James Lyle and Erica Gordon  
Photo below: Magistrates George Reynolds and Bill Rickrich*

energies towards helping others. All of these volunteer activities had ripple effects in addition to the actual work we did. They raised the profile of magistrates for the people in the venues where we volunteered, and increased the magistrates' awareness of some of the needs in the communities where we have our conferences, as well as the programs that exist to meet those needs.

The mission statement of Vail Meadows is "to enhance the quality of life for individuals of all abilities and ages by utilizing a holistic approach to life-skill development through horseback riding instruction and education." But one of the "Joys" probably said it best when she said, "This is where miracles happen." She may have identified another similarity in our various volunteer endeavors: We get to see where miracles happen. 