

# HOLDING THE REINS

BY SHERI RADFORD



*"I've had horses most of my life," says Rick Wanless. The long-time Kamloops resident thinks he was maybe eight or 10 years old the first time he rode, and he doesn't let age stop him from riding regularly today. "I'm going to be 84 in May."*

For over three decades, Rick Wanless and the Kamloops Mounted Patrol have been offering warm welcomes to visitors.

Wanless is the tireless volunteer behind the Kamloops Mounted Patrol. This ambassador group on horseback has been popular with visitors since 1990. The number of horses has fluctuated over the years, and right now the patrol has six. "They're all black, and a variety breeds," Wanless says. The newest horse was acquired last year. "He's 18, and we were pleased because we were able to give him a home when others might not want him at that age."

The animals all live on Wanless's 20-hectare (50-acre) riverside property, Hacienda Caballo, just north of Kamloops. Though the horses spend most of their time roaming free, they also go through extensive training. They must be able to remain calm in the busy town, even when confronted with crying children, barking dogs, flying soccer balls, and

honking car horns. They also learn skills such as how to navigate stairs, teeter totters, and other obstacles.

In addition to training the horses, Wanless also teaches the eager volunteer riders, many of whom are university students who had never seen a horse in real life before learning to ride. "A large number of them are from India, and they've joined up to do this because they want to make some sort of contribution and do something different while they're in a new country," he says, adding, "Most of the people that I ride with are significantly younger than I am. Many of them could be my grandsons." Wanless enjoys the energy and positivity that come from being around young people.

In the summer months, look for the patrol in Riverside Park, especially when Music in the Park is happening. Stop by to say hello, pet the horses, and pose for a snapshot. The volunteers are happy to answer questions, give directions, and chat with visitors from around the world.

As for Wanless, he sounds like a man half his age as he vows to keep running the Kamloops Mounted Patrol for as long as possible. He mentions that he and his wife have now been retirees for almost as many years as they were schoolteachers. But it's clear that by running the patrol, Wanless has never truly stopped teaching. "Absolutely," he says. "And that's part of the joy I get out of the relationship."