

# In the Saddle

By Sheri Radford

## Life lessons from the man behind the Kamloops Mounted Patrol

According to Rick Wanless, the most challenging concept for new riders to learn is “understanding the nature of a horse.” He says fledgling equestrians need help showing that they’re in charge. “It’s convincing them that they have to be the leader and the horse is the doer.”

The long-time Kamloops resident has much experience teaching riders. Since 1990, he’s led the Kamloops Mounted Patrol, a volunteer ambassador group. Most of the riders are students from countries as far-flung as India and Saudi Arabia, and they typically have zero experience with the animals. “Horses, for many of them, are not a part of their culture.”

Though the patrol’s six horses spend most of their time roaming free on Hacienda Caballo, Wanless’s 50-acre riverside property just north of Kamloops, the animals, like the riders, must also go through extensive training. They need to master skills such as how to navigate stairs, teeter totters, and other obstacles.

“We don’t make any extraordinary demands of them,” Wanless says. “It’s basically walking around the park from A to B to C, stopping and talking and visiting and welcoming



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY KAMLOOPS MOUNTED PATROL

people to the city.” But the horses must stay calm while in town, even when faced with erratic sounds and movements from children, soccer balls, Frisbees, dogs, and cars.

From May to October, the patrol can often be spotted in Riverside Park, especially during special events such as Ribfest and Music in the Park. Visitors can stop by to say hello, pet the animals, and pose for photos.

***“The horses love the attention and get very used to it. They expect it almost,” Wanless says. “Kids hug the horses all the time.”***

The volunteers on horseback are happy to answer questions, give directions, and chat with people from around the world.

Wanless speaks with enthusiasm about how he trains both the riders and the horses, and it’s easy to see traces of the long career he spent as a schoolteacher. Regardless of whether he’s instructing riders, horses, or young students, he always has the same goal:

***“You show them that they can achieve and there are really no limits if they work at it.”***

The energetic retiree turns 85 in May. After riding for three-quarters of a century, Wanless never lets his age stop him from regularly climbing back into the saddle. And he refuses to even contemplate how long he’ll be able to continue riding and leading the Kamloops Mounted Patrol, because “you start to put limits on yourself when you do that.” He says, “Keep on doing it because you can do it.”