

Still in the Saddle

The Kamloops Mounted Patrol offers warm welcomes to visitors – By Sheri Radford

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“Some people are blessed in some ways, and I guess I am,” says Rick Wanless.

The long-time Kamloops resident recalls that he was about eight or 10 years old when he first learned to ride a horse, and he still rides regularly today. “I’m grateful to be able to do that. I’m going to have my 83rd birthday in May.”

Wanless is the driving force behind the Kamloops Mounted Patrol, a popular volunteer ambassador group on horseback that has been greeting visitors since 1990. At present the patrol has six horses, ranging in age from 16 to 26. “We’ve gone through a lot of horses, I’m sad to say—but happy to say, too, because they’ve been wonderful animals. Haven’t had a bad one in the bunch.” He adds, “It has a lot to do with the way you rear them. It’s like kids.”

The horses spend most of their time roaming free on Wanless’s 50-acre riverside property, Hacienda Caballo, just north of Kamloops. There they go through extensive training to ensure they can remain calm when in town, where they face everything from screaming children to flying soccer balls to blasting train whistles. Plus they learn how to handle obstacles such as stairs and teeter totters.

“When I bring in new members, in many cases, it’s a case of the horses training the riders,” Wanless says. “When the horses go up stairs or get up on a pedestal, the new riders can’t believe what they’re doing.”

These newcomers are often students from countries such as India and China, and many of them have never even seen a horse before. “One of the joys I have is working with these young people. Most people my age spend all their time doting around with other old people,” Wanless says. “There’s a negativity sometimes as you get older. These young people are all looking forward. Their whole lives are ahead of them. I like to think that I’m giving them a bit of an experience that will last a lifetime.”

The Kamloops Mounted Patrol can often be found in Riverside Park, especially during the summer months when Music in the Park is happening. If you happen to see them, be sure to stop by and say hello, pet the horses and pose for a photo. One of the horses, a friendly fellow named Bueno, even enjoys being hugged. The riders are always happy to answer questions, give directions and chat with visitors from around the world.

As for Wanless, he plans to keep running the Kamloops Mounted Patrol for as long as he can. He says, “Nothing’s forever, but you do what you can do, while you can do it.”