

Special Tri-Cities kids enjoy a special day on the farm

It's an annual event at Cheryl's Phoenix Connection Ranch in Richland, owned by Cheryl Coppinger of CH2M HILL Hanford Group. Each year it seems to draw more participants, deliver more fun for the developmentally disabled children it serves, and require more volunteers from the ranks of CH2M HILL, Fluor Hanford, Pacific Northwest National Laboratory and other Hanford contractors.

This year, 130 children and their partners (another 130 people), plus their counselors with The Arc of the Tri-Cities Partners 'N Pals program, were hosted by Cheryl and 90 volunteers on July 18 for a day of horseback riding, visiting animals in the petting zoo, and being entertained by clowns and a magician.



Volunteer Bill Ross of CH2M HILL Hanford Group leads one of the horses carrying a happy rider.

Coppinger filed this report on the day's activities:

"The day began with the question, 'Is there any coffee?' Within a few minutes that basic need was satisfied and the work began. The magician started setting up for his act, and the clowns took two hours to prepare for a day in which they would endure the hot sun in full costumes and make-up.

"Then the last-minute items begin to fall into place. By 9 a.m. the volunteers were arriving, animated about the day ahead. Most knew what to expect, but for others it was their first time.

"Finally, the horses were brought out and groomed, and we were almost ready. But first, we needed to hold a meeting to determine job assignments and to thank everyone for their help and support of the kids. It developed into a friendly session of kibitzing and camaraderie.

"The buses arrived, and everyone (all 90 volunteers, the dog, the roosters and the horses) became alert to the stepped-up activity. Within minutes, smiling, anxious faces greeted the volunteers. Every child was ready to ride a horse, visit the goats in the petting zoo, play lawn games, interact with the magician and talk to the clowns.

"That scenario played out three times during the day until each one of the Partners 'N Pals clients had enjoyed all the activities. They didn't even seem to mind the intense heat or the dust. What each of them will remember and continue to talk about is the fun they had." ■



The clowns endured the heat in full costumes and make-up to entertain the Partners 'N Pals clients.