

SA

# SILVERLINK

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COVER STORY

Rock Ranch

SilverStone  
GROUP



 **HUB**





# harnessing a GREATER power



**ROCK RANCH**  
*Est. 2016*

There's a tranquil spot in the southwest corner of rural Minnesota. It's a scenic stretch of countryside where visitors can connect with nature, soak up the fresh air and interact with some very special horses. Resting near this property's entrance is a large, grey stone with "Rock Ranch" cleanly etched into its smooth center. Some guests come here for recreational fun, ready to learn horsemanship and riding skills from the experts. Others visit Rock Ranch hoping to gain a bit more — *hope and healing*.

## **Finding Her Stride**

Horses have always been a part of Marie LaRock's life. Her grandfather, Harold Sather, was a horseman by trade. She grew up watching him work with these powerful animals, hitching up teams and making leather tack. Eventually he bought Marie her first pony. She developed an early love of riding and caring for horses. There was never any doubt that they would be an important part of her future.



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After high school, Marie went to college to earn a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and then a Master's degree in Speech-Language Pathology from Minnesota State University – Moorhead. While completing an internship at the Anne Carlsen Center, she was introduced to equine-assisted therapies. She worked with kids in an alternative environment that provided naturally occurring learning opportunities – and she loved it.

After college, Marie provided speech therapy and instruction to students in regional school systems. During this time she discovered HorsePower, a nonprofit that uses horses to help individuals with varying physical, cognitive and emotional challenges. She eagerly became a volunteer and took a class in Hippotherapy (the practice of incorporating physical therapy, occupational therapy and / or speech therapy while riding horses).

Marie saw the benefits of equine-assisted therapy and dreamed of providing those services on a broader level. In 2016, that dream became a reality. She and her husband, Dan (a Principal on the Group Benefits Team at SilverStone Group, a HUB International company), opened the barn doors to Rock Ranch.

**Horses and Healing**

Equine-assisted therapy has been around for centuries but has gained significant traction in recent decades. Horses possess a powerful ability to help individuals overcome various physical, emotional and mental hurdles. As prey animals, they are extremely sensitive to their surroundings to avoid predators. They instinctively study and respond to human body language and other nonverbal cues. Their reactions can provide important insight into various aspects of a person's life. Not to mention, horses are large and powerful. This makes them difficult to ignore and sometimes hard to control. Analyzing a person's interaction with a horse can shed light on how they approach relationships, as well as how they cope with big or overwhelming issues.

Another reason horses are valuable therapeutic aids is their ability to connect with humans. They are social creatures that generally have defined roles within a herd. They develop their

own personalities and temperaments, much like people. One horse might be stubborn and bossy, and the next might be playful and friendly. They can mirror and respond to our behavior. They also have an incredible connection to the human heart. Horses can hear nearby heartbeats and even synchronize their heartbeats with those around them. What's more, a horse's presence can lower an individual's heart rate, helping them feel grounded and calm.

Marie has undergone specialized training in equine therapy. She is a member of PATH (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship) and is a certified Equine Specialist under Eagala (Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association). Marie and additional riding instructors lead the lessons at Rock Ranch and are assisted by other Eagala-certified mental health practitioners. Her ultimate goal is to create a space where people can come together and share positive, uplifting experiences.

**Unbridled Potential**

Rock Ranch specializes in horsemanship training, riding lessons, senior programs and mental health counseling. Guests can improve themselves physically, cognitively, socially and psychologically in a natural, faith-based atmosphere. The ranch initially focused on providing youth services, but the LaRocks quickly discovered the significant impact they could have on seniors. In early 2017, Marie took a litter of kittens to visit a senior living community. That was such a hit that she eventually brought Spirit, her Shetland pony, to visit the residents. This inspired Marie and Dan to create SeniorSaddles – a program that brings seniors out to the ranch for a tour and allows them to interact with the horses and other animals. They've even seen a few seniors saddle up and ride. These experiences can have a profound impact on aging adults, generating memories that they talk about long after their visit. Today Rock Ranch offers opportunities for all. Its Eagala program is open to any age group, as well as community education programs that are coordinated through local school districts to offer beginner lessons.





*To ride* a horse is  
*To fly* without wings.  
~Anonymous

In addition to expanding its services, Rock Ranch has also expanded its footprint with an indoor arena. Built in 2020, the new facility is creating significant opportunities for growth. It is equipped with a riding arena, five horse stalls, a conference room, offices, a handicap-accessible viewing platform and an indoor wash area for the horses. Not only will this help Rock Ranch provide services year-round, rain or shine, but it will allow its service menu to grow. Private lessons, a women's riding group and a teenage riding group have been added to the schedule. The arena will also be available for bible studies, corporate gatherings and meetings for organizations within the surrounding communities.

### **Answered Prayers**

Marie and Dan have always approached this calling with an open mind, developing programs based on where they see the most interest and need. They will continue to rely on their faith and move in the directions they feel pulled. Research and continuing education on equine-assisted mental health is a top priority at the ranch. They hope to eventually partner with higher education institutions to further that work.

SilverStone Group, a HUB International company, applauds Rock Ranch for its incredible work. We are honored to call the LaRocks part of our family, and we know they will continue to have a positive impact on our communities for years to come.

