

MEET DEBBIE SMITH, HARTH'S FEATURED VOLUNTEER OF OCTOBER!



One beautiful day at HARTH, Debbie Smith was preparing for her side walking duties for an upcoming therapeutic riding lesson. Before the student arrived, the team explained to Debbie how this particular child does not communicate very well unless he is around the horses. With this in mind, Debbie waited patiently for the child to arrive and then helped with a wonderful therapeutic riding lesson at HARTH. Debbie recalled these moments as she told the story of her favorite memory from HARTH:

“Just watching them [the child] come alive with the horses and seeing the love they share with them... that rapport and giggle...”

Seeing the effect of HARTH’s therapeutic riding lessons on this child is a big part of what brings Debbie so much joy as she volunteers at HARTH.

We are so thankful for all that Debbie does helping out as a cherished volunteer at HARTH. October marks her first year anniversary volunteering with us (as well as her birthday), making her featured volunteer month extra special!

When asked about Debbie, Sherry Atherton (HARTH’s President and Founder) smiled and said:

“She is so down to earth, just so part of the HARTH family... she just comes here and gets to work... and always with a smile!”

Debbie discovered HARTH while trekking along with the Hill Country Trekkers, when a couple in the group told her about their volunteer experience at HARTH helping with the horses. This instantly intrigued her because she grew up with horses; her dad had a horse named Blaze and she recalled how he would ride up the Salt Grass Trail every year. Debbie also recounted:

“I was looking for something to fulfill me, and this has turned out to be my happy place... the camaraderie with the horses, the volunteers out here... I just love it!”

She went on to explain how:

“when I saw how much the horses help disabled children and veterans... it intrigued me and I wanted to be more involved!”

As a HARTH volunteer, Debbie is a trained side walker and horse handler for our Therapeutic Riding Program. She also plays an integral part in our volunteer family as she helps with keeping the barn clean and grooming our therapy horses. Grooming the horses is one of her favorite things to do at HARTH, and Doobie is her favorite horse!

When asked what advice Debbie would give to others who are thinking about volunteering at HARTH, she explained how some people think volunteering entails lots of work but emphasized how it is so **“worth it!”** She described how:

“you will learn so much about horses, how kind they are and that you don’t have to be afraid of them... They can be your best friend!”

Debbie has taken part in several of our Horsemanship Class Series, levels I and II, and explained how Jereny Johnson (HARTH’s PATH Certified Instructor) is **“a horse whisperer.”** She described how she has learned so much about horses’ personalities:

“Some are introverts and some are extroverts, just like humans... HARTH kind of puts another spin on horses.”

At HARTH, we value building trusting partnerships with our horses which in turn brings healing to so many.

Debbie said that if she could share one thing about HARTH with others, it would be how:

“It’s gratifying out here... I have just learned so much about the horses and in a different way... the communication with the horses, coming here and seeing the end result... it’s just worth it.”

When asked what makes HARTH special to her, she smiled saying how heartwarming it is seeing the **“communication between the horses and the child, and the love between them...”** She described how volunteering at HARTH is **“very fulfilling”** for her:

“I just feel like I’m a part of helping, it’s all a part of helping so children and veterans can benefit... seeing the end result with the kids as they walk up and get so excited laughing... just watching the children come alive makes me realize how fortunate I am.”

We are so grateful for Debbie’s kindness and heart she has for all those who come out to the farm. Looking back on her favorite memory from HARTH when she was a side walker for a child who could not communicate as well, and seeing how he simply came alive around the horses, one can see how that experience inspires Debbie as she volunteers at HARTH.

Whether it be her duties as a side walker, horse handler, or helping around the barn, Debbie is a unique member of the HARTH family! We are so grateful for you, Debbie; we would not be the same without you! And, happy one year anniversary of volunteering at HARTH!