

## Business uses horses to teach humans about nonverbal cues

BY LYNN DUCEY  
Phoenix Business Journal

Scottsdale resident Koelle Simpson is using her love of horses to build a business that helps others establish human relationships.

Simpson owns and operates The Gift of Equus, a company that uses the power of horses to improve human relationships.

"Horses are such a powerful teacher when it comes to balanced leadership and developing trust," Simpson said.

Under her direction, the firm offers half-day and full-day demonstrations, team-building exercises and small group seminars at properties across the West, including the Checker 7 Ranch in Rio Verde.

"At first, it may seem very strange. We have become so ... focused on words, but our real messages are coming across non-verbally. So when we communicate with our co-workers, there are a lot of other things going on," Simpson said.

Because horses respond to nonverbal, physical cues, working with the animals helps people break through mental barriers and see how they are perceived by others, Simpson said.

Tom Persechino, senior director of marketing for the American Quarterhorse Association, said horses have been a source of healing and learning for people across ages, class and abilities for years.

"This is what captivates people with horses," he said. "They are these big, powerful animals. But the more you spend time with them, you realize that they are these gentle creatures that you can learn so much from."

Persechino said horses are used in self-help, healing and leadership courses across the country, including programs for the disabled as well as weight-loss regimens.

While working with horses for corpo-

rate team-building events may seem like fun rather than work, human resource professionals say such exercises are key to effective organizations.

"By participating in such events, a lot of the barriers break down that exist in the normal work environment," said Robert Dyer, president of the Northern Arizona Human Resource Association and a member of the HR department at Northern Arizona University.

"These activities are important," he said. "It helps to develop relationships where you feel closer to your co-workers."

Using skills she developed as a student of "horse whisperer" Monty Roberts, Simpson leads many of the Equus seminars, but she also contracts with a handful of experts to help.

Programs include small-group offerings that allow one-on-one interaction with horses, as well as larger seminars with horse demonstrations for up to 100 people.

Individuals can book spots for three-day workshops at resort properties, including Bishop's Lodge in Santa Fe, N.M.; Paws Up Resort in Greenough, Mont.; and the Crossings Retreat in Austin, Texas.

The three-day resort workshops start at about \$4,000 per person, which includes all expenses except transportation to the property, said Simpson. She declined to discuss group or corporate pricing.



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY THE GIFT OF EQUUS

**Koelle Simpson started The Gift of Equus to help others improve their relationships. The business offers seminars focusing on improving nonverbal communications.**



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### GET CONNECTED

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**American Quarterhorse Association:**  
[www.aqha.org](http://www.aqha.org)  
**Northern Arizona Human Resource Association:**  
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