

ROCKPORT

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Town resident heals horses, dogs, cats, people

By MICHELLE MORRISSEY
Times staff

ROCKPORT — "Good, Carmelita, good. It's OK. You're alright." Deborah Ramsey speaks calmly to her patient, who is a little apprehensive at first under the bright bulb of a newspaper photographer's camera flash.

Then Carmelita settles in to what has become a routine, something she actually enjoys now and then.

Ramsey, a chiropractor, finds Carmelita's trouble spots and helps get her spine back into realignment.

But Carmelita is no ordinary patient. She's a Paso Fino, a small horse used for centuries in riding shows and recreation.

And Ramsey is no ordinary chiropractor. After 19 years of working on people, she has expanded her practice to horses, dogs and cats. She treats the people out of an office in Brookline; the animals she sees at her residence on South Street.

Carmelita is special in another way, says Ramsey. The horse came to Ramsey crippled. She could not bend her back legs. She was abused so severely that when someone tried to get on her to ride, she would faint from the pain.

According to Ramsey, Carmelita was on her way to the slaughter house.

But now, thanks to the love and attention of Ramsey, as well as some chiropractic therapy, the horse is healthy and friendly, "a real sweetheart," Ramsey says.

Ramsey has been working on animals for three years now. She said making the transition from

people to horses was not hard: the hard part was finding a place to keep the horses.

At first, Ramsey had difficulty getting town approval for her horse barn on South Street.

"This area was originally zoned for 10 houses," she says, pointing to the horses' play area that, while great for animals, appears too small for so many houses.

So Ramsey got together with two of her neighbors, in an effort to protect the wetlands that lay between their three homes.

"Two of the neighbors back there each bought an acre with the idea that they would protect it as a natural habitat, and I bought this to turn into a horse area," Ramsey said. "It's worked out really well."

Last fall, Ramsey built the barn, which now houses four horses — three of her own and a visiting patient.

Ramsey first started equine chiropractic medicine three years ago when she took a chiropractic course. With the help of her teacher, she learned how to modify the practices with human patients to adapt to dogs and horses.

According to the American Association of Equine Practitioners, horse chiropractic is just one of the non-traditional treatments that horses are receiving: acupuncture, herbology and massage and physical therapy are also making their way into the stables.

Ramsey said usually she'll see a horse for a consultation visit, free of charge.

"I'll watch how he walks, his gait, how the rider gets on him, how his saddle fits," Ramsey said. She explained that when a rider mounts a horse, he or she usually mounts from the left side. After a

while, that can pull the horse's spine out of alignment.

Using a tool called an Activator, a small metal instrument with a rubber tip, Ramsey sends quick spurts of pressure to various points along the horse's spine and back haunches.

"You'd think they might be scared, but they really seem to like it," Ramsey said.

Ramsey says a chiropractor should do three passes across the horse's body: the first to isolate the problem, the second to clear it, and a third to make sure the problem is fixed.

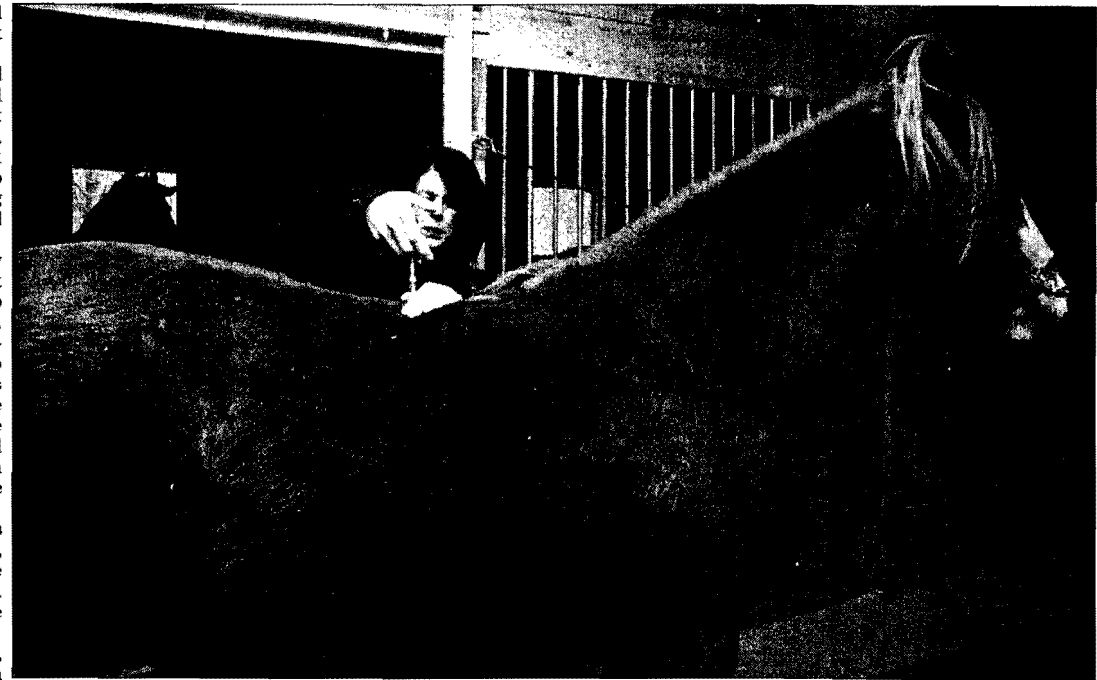
"I love this, it's fun," said Ramsey, who added that she grew up with horses. "I want to help these animals."

She said often, when a horse has a problem, a traditional veterinarian will prescribe medication.

"Drugs may help the pain, but they mask the symptoms and the problem," she said. "If there's a way to help horses without drugs, I'd like to try it."

Susan Favaloro, a Gloucester resident who keeps her horses in Rockport, said she first started going to Ramsey three years ago.

"We had a mare that was really wrecked up," Favaloro said. "Some-



Bert A. Piscitello photo

Deborah Ramsey uses an instrument called an activator to send bits of pressure to various spots on the horse's back. Carmelita is just one of the many patients Ramsey treats from her South Street home.

one recommended we put her to sleep."

The Favaloro mare started to heal, but very slowly, and her back still goes out of alignment.

"Debbie is wonderful," Favaloro said. "We have an old quarter horse we take, too, just to keep him healthy."

Favaloro said the chiropractic also cuts down on medical bills, for

too many drugs that were being prescribed to the horse.

"He's only taking one medication right now, and that's significantly less than what he was taking for inflammation and colic," she said.

Ramsey travels throughout the North Shore making house calls to horses, dogs and cats. She currently sees 15 horses in Rockport, many of them from Charlie Lane's

farm, as well as horses from Ipswich and Gloucester.

The horses at Ramsey's stables are Paso Finos, a smaller horse, known for being gentle and easy to ride.

Because they only walk, not trot, the horses are often ridden by elderly people, riders who have suffered injuries, or special needs children who are in events like the Special Olympics.

Police/Fire/Ambulance

Police notes

dles, and sometimes chants. He

Calendar

Friday, Feb. 18

Evangelical church. Sunday School at 9:15 a.m.

Monday, Feb. 21

should be accompanied by an adult.