Tales Of An Easy-Going 'Dark Horse'



SUN PHOTO BY CICELY BABB

Carson Justice enjoys riding a horse and being led by a Holston Home youth.

'Peppy Party' Celebrates Linka's Holston Home-Inspired Storybook

BY CICELY BABB
SUN INTERN

When Cierra Linka began an internship last summer at Holston United Methodist Home for Children, she did not anticipate an opportunity for a book tour this summer to pop up.

Since writing and publishing "Peppy the Easy-Going Racehorse," Linka has been traveling to promote her storybook and the message behind it: "Be yourself, embrace everyone's differences, and try your best."

Linka was back at Holston Home Wednesday for a celebratory "Peppy Party at the Barn," greeting visitors and giving them a chance to meet the real-life Peppy and ride horses.

A social work student and Roan Scholar at East Tennessee State University, Linka began working with Holston Home youth and children in the equine therapy program for her "Roan Summer of Service."

The Roan Scholars Leadership Program had a focus on childhood literacy during the 2018-19 academic year, when Linka was fulfilling the requirement with her work at Holston Home. That in mind, she wrote a story about Peppy, a horse there she grew to love.

Holston Home's equine therapy program helps students learn various skills by working with the animals. By taking care of the horses, they learn to care for themselves, Linka said.

The experience is also therapeutic, as they develop relationships and connections with four-legged friends.

Sue Bernier, resource development coordinator at Holston Home, said the youth often connect with specific animals, developing a deep personal relationship with "their" horse.

Linka had no prior experience with horses before working with the program. Over the course of the summer, though, she became particularly close with Peppy, often taking him under her care, as he wasn't usually chosen by students often looking for the "fastest" or "strongest" animal.

Peppy is a Tennessee Walking Horse with a distinct personality — laid back and usually preferring to "stop and smell the flowers," not race or compete, Linka said.

Her story introduces him as a short,

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SUN PHOTO BY CICELY BABB

Peppy, a Tennessee Walking Horse at Holston United Methodist Home For Children, inspired Cierra Linka to write a book about him: "Peppy the Easy-Going Racehorse."

PEPPY

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wide racehorse, "never in a hurry to get anywhere."

Linka appreciated Peppy's quirks, and the two "became best friends over that summer."

The tale in the book she's promoting is inspired by a true story of when Linka and other staff members were enjoying a ride and decided to race.

Unexpectedly, Peppy pepped up, speeding ahead of the others to the finish line.

The horse seemingly least likely to win taking everyone by surprise that day inspired Linka.

"Just because you are different doesn't mean you aren't capable of great and awesome things," she said.

Holston Home supports Linka and the message she is using her book to convey.

"What a great story," Bradley Williams, president and CEO said. "Following the Lord can be a very fun adventure, because God is always doing the unexpected. He loves the 'least of these' and uses the least likely."

Linka's story was illustrated by Clara Reynolds, another Roan Scholar.

Originally written specifically for Holston Home, published copies were intended to be given free of charge to children there.

With its success and after printing more copies, Linka is looking for more places to "reach out to students to share the story and teach them to love themselves better."

She hopes to put the book on Amazon.com in the future as well.