

OLE'S OVERCOMES DISABILITY, EARNS EQUESTRIAN HONOR

LOSING THE USE OF HER RIGHT ARM HASN'T STOPPED LAURA OLES

By Ben Bannister
STAFF WRITER

Wildlife biologist Laura Oles, of Kemmerer has been chosen to receive the 2011 Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH) International's Independent Adult Equestrian of the Year Award.

"You have to have a disability and have achieved the level of riding independently in spite of that disability for two or more years," said Oles of the honor from PATH. Oles lost the use of her right arm after a skiing accident.

And "independently" means the equestrian can ride without the aid of a sidewalker – someone who will walk alongside the horse and help to stabilize the rider as needed, or lead the horse as directed by an instructor.

Oles was nominated by the National Abilities Center in Park City, Utah, where she has been taking lessons, but she was riding long before her accident.

"I've been riding since I was a child," Oles said. "I especially like dressage."

Dressage is a competitive equestrian sport that is defined by the International Equestrian Federation (IEF) as "the highest expression of horse training."

"It's a riding style that originated in England," Oles noted. "It focuses on precision, balance and the movement

of the horse."

According to the IEF, "Its fundamental purpose is to develop, through standardized progressive training methods, a horse's natural athletic ability and willingness to perform, thereby maximizing its potential as a riding horse. At the peak of a dressage horse's gymnastic development, the horse will respond smoothly to a skilled rider's minimal aids. The rider will be relaxed and appear effort-free while the horse willingly performs the requested movement."

Dressage is often referred to as "horse ballet," because of its fluidity and grace.

"I have a lot of fun taking dressage lessons," Oles said. "But people should know that National Abilities Center offers more than just dressage lessons. They offer ropes courses, skiing, shed hockey, bicycling and have camps."

The National Abilities Center helps kids with autism or Downs syndrome, troubled youths and injured American soldiers in the Wounded Warriors program through equine-assisted activities and therapies.

They also offer riding lessons for all people, whether or not they are disabled.

"I'm really glad I found the National Abilities Center," Oles said. "They have really improved my riding skills since the accident, and boosted my confidence."

The National Abilities Center, a member of PATH, also gives Oles a place to ride indoors during the winter.

"There's nowhere to ride indoors in Kemmerer," Oles said. "Thanks to the center, I only missed riding one week last year. This helps me maintain my balance and keeps me from getting sore when I ride outdoors in the spring."

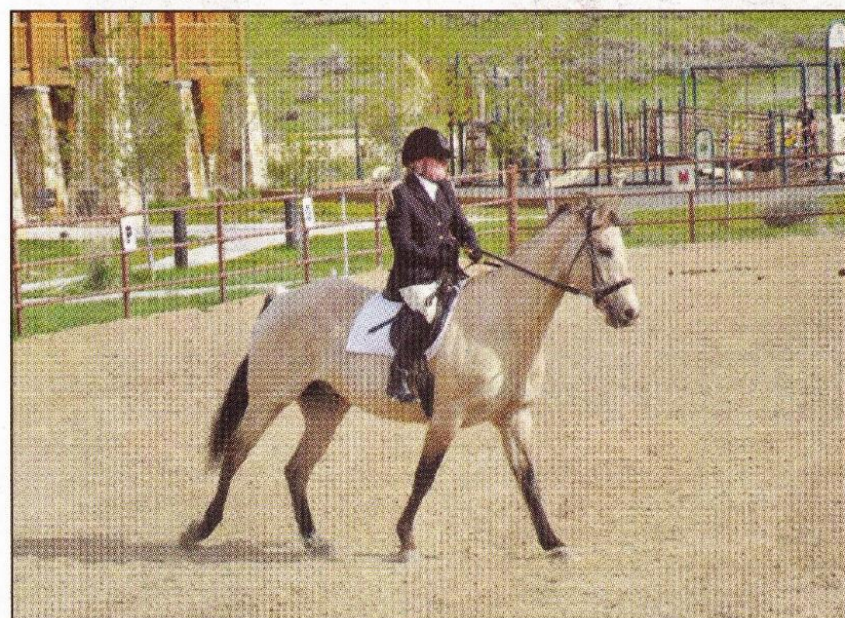
Oles also said watching others ride at the center is inspiring, as she moved toward the door.

"You'll have to excuse me now," Oles said with a smile. "It's time for me to leave for my riding lesson."



Courtesy photos

Laura Oles has been riding horse since she was a child. The National Abilities Center, a member of PATH, also gives Oles a place to ride indoors during the winter.



Wildlife biologist Laura Oles takes dressage lessons at the National Abilities Center in Park City, Utah. Oles has been nominated for the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International's Independent Adult Equestrian of the Year Award.

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