Happy Trails looking for volunteers

Organization: Happy Trails Riding Academy
Volunteer opportunity: Anyone 14 years and older who is physically fit enough to walk for one and a half hours with occasional jogging can apply to be an arena volunteer at this therapeutic equestrian riding academy for children and adults with physical, mental and emotional disabilities.

Happy Trails Riding Academy is a nonprofit organization that provides a unique alternative therapy program for self-improvement that only a horse can provide, said Leslie Gardner, executive director.

Arena volunteers walk on the side of the horse near the rider or lead the horse. No experience working with horses or disabled people is required.

“We will teach them everything,” she said, “If they have a big heart and couple hours to spare, we can put them to work.”

New recruits participate in a 4-hour orientation Aug. 31. They learn about the classes offered at Happy Trails and get some background on some of the more common disabilities of the riders, said Shannon Smith, volunteer coordinator.

“We talk a lot about safety and different volunteer roles and rules,” she said.

The orientation culminates with some hands-on training involving real horses and volunteers simulating disabled riders.

Happy Trails has about 80 volunteers who volunteer each week. The nonprofit organization hopes to get 30 new volunteers. At first, volunteers are placed on an on-call waiting list and are asked to volunteer as needed when another volunteer calls in sick or goes on vacation, she said.

Once more classes are offered or more students sign up for classes, new volunteers get moved from the on-call list.

When: Happy Trails will offer classes in the morning and the afternoon on Tuesdays through Saturdays beginning Sept. 3.

Anyone wishing to volunteer is invited to attend a volunteer orientation from 1:30-5:30 p.m. on Aug. 31 at Happy Trails Riding Academy, 2773 E. Oakdale Ave. (Avenue 256) in Tulare. Go east on Avenue 256 from Mooney Boulevard about a quarter of a mile. Happy Trails will be on the south side.

Contact: Shannon Smith, 688-8685, to RSVP.