

# Connor's RIDE

NEUROBALANCE CENTER IN BARRINGTON, BRAVEHEARTS THERAPEUTIC RIDING IN POPLAR GROVE, AND PASSION FOR POLO IN BARRINGTON HILLS TEAM UP TO OFFER A WORLD OF SUPPORT FOR A YOUNG MAN WHO IS REDEFINING HIS LIFE AFTER A MOTORCYCLE ACCIDENT



Joy Wagner and Connor Stickney get ready to ride downtown on BraveHearts' Winston and Gunnar.





The four riders head to town with a Barrington Police escort while the NeuroBalance van follows.



A warm welcome by Village leaders as the team arrives to town.

NEUROBALANCE CENTER'S FOUNDER and driving force is Joy Wagner, someone who has walked in the footsteps of the clients who seek her center's services. A pediatric nurse, Wagner was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in 2001. As the single mom of two daughters who were very young at the time, she was knocked off her feet with the MS diagnosis. For four months she could not walk, drive, or read. She gave up her nursing job and needed help to manage the day to day.

Since that diagnosis, Wagner was determined to find ways to help herself, and then others, so she founded fitMS, a specialized exercise program that was offered in many locations. Later the services would grow into fitMS NeuroBalance, an exercise program for a greater pool of people with the mobility issues associated with MS, Parkinson's Disease, Crohn's, Celiac, fibromyalgia, stroke, and much more. In time, the services Wagner was offering people became NeuroBalance, a nonprofit services entity. An ADA and mobility friendly services facility was built in Barrington with the support of the community—a first of its kind.

Today, NeuroBalance Center (NBC) offers a lifeline of services for people whose conventional and insurance-supported rehabilitation services end. "People come to us when everyday life does not look the same anymore," Wagner says. "They don't know where to go and they might graduate from therapy, but it's to the couch, to depression. We are their post-graduate program, and we help them maximize their quality of life. They're creating a new normal and we can help their health condition progress much more slowly."

Connor Stickney, a Barrington native, didn't seem to be a typical client for NeuroBalance thought his dad, Jon. But after a conversation with Wagner at the NeuroBalance Center, Jon Stickney learned NBC was ideal for his son's long-term recovery from a motorcycle accident whereby he lost a portion of his leg. The young man eventually agreed to take physical therapy there, and Wagner had the idea of taking a new pilot program offsite and employing horses for the therapy. The idea of a ride into downtown Barrington from the center arose from this pilot program. "What a great way to

showcase our work and offer a heartfelt surprise for the Stickney family and honor our organizations' supportive bank team," Wagner said.

### *Three Visionary Teams*

Wagner had known Meggan Hill-McQueeney, the CEO of BraveHearts Therapeutic Riding, since her daughter was young and wanted to learn about horses. The two had met while Hill-McQueeney was with Cowboy Dreams near Barrington, prior to BraveHearts. They had kept in touch ever since. Wagner's MS diagnosis happened at that time they met. "Meggan is a doer," Wagner said. "She said 'let's try this' and she got me on a horse!" Wagner tapped the therapeutic riding expert for her expertise and to source the horses.

Wagner also connected with Frauke and Jan-Dirk Lueders who have a polo facility in Barrington Hills and operate Passion for Polo. The two parties connected and met up at NeuroBalance for a tour, and then toured the polo facility as a place for her clients to ride. "The facility was an ADA heaven for our clients," Wagner said. "The ramps, the thresholds, the parking lots and access, rubber brick flooring surfaces, as well as the polo field's stable footing are all ideal for us." The Lueders graciously offered their indoor polo field for the NBC therapeutic riding program which was held in the summer.

### *A Ride to Town*

Connor Stickney, Joy Wagner, Meggan Hill-McQueeney, and U.S.M.C. Veteran Marshall Wolfe saddled up with BraveHearts' horses at NBC on Tuesday, August 31 and with a police escort, made the ride to town. Greeters from the Village of Barrington awaited, as did the Stickney family who were told to head outside by the bank. Emotions ran high when the group arrived.

For Wagner, the moment was poignant as well. "There's no better feeling for me than when we are able to help someone who one of our donors loves. There's no better proof of model than this. It's why we believe Barrington is lucky to have this place."





Connor Stickey's ride was a surprise to his dad, BBT President Jon Stickney, who greets the team along with wife Patti Stickney and Brad Stetson, bank chairman.

## An Interview with CONNOR STICKNEY

### *How did your motorcycle accident change your life?*

**CS:** My wife (Jessica Stickney) was on the back of the motorcycle, and she was injured, too, with a tibial plateau fracture and bruising. She has made a full physical recovery and has been my biggest supporter in my recovery over the last year. Our accident has changed our lives in many ways. We collided, head-on, with a careless driver going 45mph down Lake Cook Road through Barrington Hills at Ridge Road. Knowing the circumstances, I was surprised when I woke up at Lutheran General days after the crash. It was all very scary and heavy to process how different our new lives would be. I wept tears of joy to learn that Jess would be okay.

I sustained multiple injuries, from fracturing my orbital socket (face), breaking my pelvis, to a compound femur fracture. With the amputation of my left leg (below the knee), and a femur that has not healed yet (over a year later), our lives have changed drastically. We decided to move to Deer Park from Bucktown, Chicago to be closer to our family's support and for a more accessible lifestyle with easier access to resources such as the NeuroBalance Center (NBC). While our lives have changed tempo, we have been able to reprioritize what is important in our lives while we heal together from the mental trauma, and I regain my mobility and independence. I think we've both gained a lot of perspective on what is important, and we are extremely grateful for each day we have.

### *You've been working with Neurobalance Center. How are they helping you?*

**CS:** I began working out with Nick at the NBC last winter. They have helped me become stronger and more independent with my mobility. With their facilities, I have been able to have workouts where I could walk and even jog while my weight was lessened in their harnessed treadmill. Today, I am able to jog, unassisted by the harness, in my running blade. It's a goal that I couldn't imagine achieving this soon in my recovery without their assistance. They have given me the gift of moving more freely, with less pain. Joy has also afforded me the opportunities to learn new therapeutic



Mission accomplished! From left: J.C. Stickney, Jon Stickney, Connor Stickney, Meggan Hill-McQueeney/BraveHearts, Frauke Lueders/Passion for Polo, Patti Stickney, Joy Wagner, and USMC Veteran and Bravehearts trainer, Marshall Wolfe.





hobbies such as boxing and riding horseback. When I visit the center for my weekly workouts, I am pushed to exert myself physically and Nick gives me a thorough stretch and massage to help with the soreness and maintain/increase my mobility.

**What your horseback ride from the Center to BBT the first time you were on a horse?**

**CS:** In the Spring of 2021, Joy reached out to me to include me in a weekly pilot program for the NBC with BraveHearts that would take place over the summer. I was hesitant to sign up, but Joy made sure that I didn't miss out. I'm very glad that she urged me so strongly to sign up for the program. I had not had the opportunity to learn how to horseback ride in my past and did not know much about horses. Once a week, I went to learn about how much of a bond can be created with such powerful animals. My favorite horse is Hank. He would listen to my cues and pick up on my energy. Whenever I arrived, he leaned his face into my chest to greet me with a hug. I'm proud to say now that Hank and I can walk, trot, canter, and gallop (I never in my life imagined myself galloping on a horse while sporting a prosthetic leg!). Meggan Hill-McQueeney, who wears a prosthetic arm, was easy to relate with and she is a fantastic coach from BraveHearts. Participating in this program helped me build confidence and was the highlight of my week all summer. My anxieties would fade into the background. The ride through town to BBT was my first time riding outdoors and the furthest distance I had traveled on horseback. It was a special day to show my dad, one of my biggest supporters (who had not seen me on a horse yet), what I had learned and the progress I had gained. U



The Stickneys (from left) are Patti, Connor, Jon, and Jon Charles.

## Horse POWER

BY JON STICKNEY

Our son Connor did not seem the typical client for NeuroBalance Center (NBC), given his age and injury. I knew Joy and called to explain Connor's story and she responded, "NBC is perfect for Connor" without even meeting him. When Patti and I then told Connor about Joy and NBC, I think he was reluctant, but after meeting with Joy, he was 100% onboard with whatever they threw at him. Horseback riding was the last thing he expected. Connor told us about this new horse therapy program that they wanted him to try, in addition to his weekly physical therapy with Nick. I honestly cringed at the thought of his badly broken body, which was healing with all sorts of screws, rods, and hardware holding it together, and getting on a large, unpredictable animal and bouncing about.

Well, Connor loved it. He loved it all. It is unexplainable to most, unless you've experienced the physical and mental trauma, loss of abilities, setbacks—the power of horse therapy is a way to partially regain what was lost. The people who run the program understand this and provided Connor this bridge to help regain a little bit of what he lost. Healing doesn't come from one single source, it has been the combination of family, concerned friends, and co-workers, his doctors and therapists, and Hank the horse.

The day Connor and the Bravehearts team rode into town to visit me at the bank, it was a secret and a big surprise for me—100% unexpected. A very emotional moment for me and Patti, to see him strong and in charge of his horse, with all my co-workers and village friends lining the parking lot as they arrived. Still get choked up as I write this...

I met Joy several years ago when she and NBC became a customer of BBT. We instantly hit it off when we realized each were Iowa Hawk-eyes. She shared her personal story with me and how and why she founded NBC. Joy is beyond special, and this community is beyond fortunate to have her be part of it. She is the real deal! The world needs more Joy Wagners.

*Jon C. Stickney is the president of Barrington Bank & Trust Company, N.A.*