



## When Rotary and BSO are Saddled for Service with their HORSE HEROES

BY CAROLYN BURK, PRESIDENT

Horses have been known to change people's lives. If you own horses, ride horses, or simply enjoy being around horses you know what I mean. Their extraordinarily positive influence is well documented and research shows that mere eye contact with a horse can relieve anxiety. Similarly, the excitement triggered by petting a horse or actually riding one has been shown to strengthen communication skills and build confidence. In fact, studies have revealed that non-verbal autistic children have suddenly started talking by calling out the horse's name or asking the horse to walk. It is no surprise then that our equine friends are growing in popularity in the world of therapeutics. So, from these facts and deeply moving experiences, a project was born and aptly named HOISE HEROES.

The Rotary Club of Weston, a local service organization made up of business and professional men and women, knew it was on to something. Pairing the needs of a nearby foster care facility, Children's Harbor, whose mission is to attend

to children in crisis with the resources of The Mounted Division of the Broward Sheriff's Office could touch a child's life in a positive way. And, that's what Rotarians seek to do: make a difference, one day at a time, one project at a time.

That's when Kell Hackley, a well-known immigration attorney and the Broward Sheriff's Office set the project in motion. Kell, alongside her Project Co-Chair and fellow Rotarian Doug Maymon, met with BSO Deputies who introduced them to Dakota, and three other beautiful horses who were identified to participate in the first outing to Children's Harbor. It may sound a bit farfetched, but I believe the horses actually looked pleased when they learned of their task. Twenty children, in groups of 5, would be reading passages of the classic *Black Beauty* to the horses, who will listen intently and without judgment.

It is a simple but powerful idea that grew into a special project which has impacted all concerned. The power of the horse is beyond words: They are indeed our Horse Heroes.