



Garrett County draws more than one million visitors each year who come to explore its scenic setting in the heart of Maryland's Allegheny Mountains. One of the best ways to explore its hills and valleys is on horseback.

Tammy Mattingly, owner/manager of Broken Spoke Stables would agree. She and her staff offer boarding, training, and riding lessons at Broken Spoke Stables, located on 90 acres of rolling farmland in Pleasant Valley, near Oakland. The facility offers riding trails, an outdoor riding arena, indoor arena, round pen and spacious stalls. While their focus is on Western, aspiring equestrians can also learn English, Dressage

and hunter/jumper styles of riding. Broken Spoke also offers horses for sale that have gone through their unique training program.

Tammy and her husband, John, acquired the property for Broken Spoke Stables in a somewhat unconventional manner. When John and Tammy moved back to Oakland in 2004, after spending 3 years in Colorado, they moved into a rental house that they thought would be very short term. They had always had their eye on a piece of land in Pleasant Valley but the owners wanted way more than they could pay. Several years passed and one day as they were driving home they saw black billows of smoke rising up into the sky right over that

A woman with long dark hair is riding a dark horse in a hazy, sunlit landscape. The scene is captured from a low angle, showing the horse's head and the rider's silhouette against a bright, hazy background of rolling hills and trees. The lighting is soft and golden, suggesting early morning or late afternoon. The overall mood is peaceful and scenic.

A Visit to **Broken Spoke Stables** *in Garrett County, Maryland*

Horseback, one of the best ways to explore the remote Allegheny Mountain Region

Written by: **Sara Mullins**
Photography by: **Lance C. Bell**

Left to right: Don Mason, Bailey Skiles and Sarah Heckman on an evening ride.

same property. Curious, they took a quick detour and were shocked to see the big old farm house completely ablaze.

John was working as a contractor at the time and had just finished a beautiful home on 12 acres in a gated community. The spec sheet had just been printed and that is when he got the crazy idea which changed their lives. On the back of the spec sheet John wrote in pencil: Will trade you this house and property for your farm as is. Then they got in their truck and drove to the motel where the owners were now staying. Tammy wasn't at all sure this was a good idea but John walked right up and knocked on their door and handed them the paper.

Two hours later they called and wanted to see the house. The next day they called again and by the end of the week John and Tammy were sitting with their attorney trying to make him understand that this was a simple trade, no money was exchanging hands. Their attorney just scratched his head and said he had never done anything like that before and asked if they were sure it was what they wanted to do.

Despite what Tammy describes as "a few major bumps in the road," the Mattinglys closed on the property and in April 2008, Tammy took in her first boarder in the small original nine-stall barn. Tammy had only planned on filling the five extra stalls to help offset

the cost of her own four horses, but she realized there was a need and filled it. Broken Spoke Stables now has 29 stalls, 45 acres of pasture, and all the amenities of a full service boarding stable.

Tammy has taught nearly 200 riding students from ages 4 to 72 how to become confident and safe riders. Today, half of her boarders are summer people who want to experience a slice of country life. Tammy says, “It often starts with riding lessons followed by the purchase of their own horse. Our lessons are tailored for the rider’s specific needs and our creative teaching style helps insure that each student gets the most out of their lessons.”

Tammy has fond memories of her first horse, a Palomino Quarter Horse named Brick. When she first saw him “it was love at first sight,” she says, “only one small problem, I had no idea what to do with him; how to handle him, how to lead him, I didn’t even know how to put a saddle on.” On a friend’s advice, she found an instructor that worked with her, and Brick became her constant companion until his death at age 29.

Before Brick’s passing, Tammy purchased a Morgan horse named “Chance.” He was a powerful animal in need of a strong leader but because she lacked confidence herself, she seldom rode him. Tammy remembers, “The evening Brick died, Chance was standing with his neck stretched over into the now empty stall. I went in to comfort him and he wrapped his head around my neck and embraced me, that is when I promised him that it was his turn, I was determined to rise to the challenge of his athletic ability.” That challenge convinced her to explore ways to train Chance. She came upon the “Downunder Horsemanship” method which emphasizes groundwork and riding exercises designed to help riders gain a horse’s respect and trust. Tammy invited nationally known trainer Megan Warlick to her facility to learn more about this method of training. After three grueling days of instruction, Tammy and Chance were bonded like never before. “Most people think you control a horse with pressure.



Tammy Mattingly and husband John, owners of Broken Spoke Stables.

That’s not true. The release of pressure at the correct moment is the best way to control the horse. It’s the secret of horsemanship. I teach all my students the emergency stop technique this way,” says Tammy.

From her own experience, Tammy learned that many riders could benefit from confidence clinics where they would learn to take the lead with their horses, so she offered her first clinic five years ago at a low price to attract participants. She also placed an ad in the local newspaper and much to her surprise the clinic filled. Her annual confidence clinics



Bailey Skiles with Suzie.

now fill quickly. She attributes some of the draw to the lunches her mother, now in her 70s, prepares with “awesome, fresh foods from her garden.” Broken Spoke offers other clinics on topics that have included equine nutrition and health, natural horsemanship, and jumping.

Tammy was also led into the realm of equine therapy by a nephew with muscular dystrophy. “I had hoped to teach him to ride but his condition prevented him from sitting in the saddle. After his death, I discovered that his younger brother, Travis, needed a horse more than I realized,” she says. “Travis came to the stable and

asked if he could pet a horse and he chose Star. Horses have something to give humans that they can’t get anywhere else.” That realization was reinforced by her experience with an autistic girl with cystic fibrosis. Tammy says, “The girl’s response to her first ride taught me how to prepare for her best experience. She needed a specific destination more than just a pony ride going around in a circle.” Now, at the end of the school year, all the special needs classes in Garrett County come to Broken Spoke Stables and they have a blast. Although she is not certified in equine therapy, she has learned to let people teach her what they need from the riding experience and the horse. One such person is Julie, who takes weekly lessons with three other women. Despite a diagnosis of cancer, she doesn’t want to be treated differently from anyone else. Her horse, Charlie, has been instrumental in her ongoing recovery.

Tammy says, “There is no short cut when it comes to learning how to ride. Like any relationship, you get what you put into it, so I encourage my students to ride as often as they can. People tell me, ‘this place is different.’ I am blessed to have a supportive husband; a fabulous team of young women who work for me, and a diverse group of clients who have become like family. I teach six to seven hours daily and I simply love



Taylor Day works with Suzie in the indoor riding ring.



my job! It is different every day, and I never stop learning...horses are great teachers. It is so rewarding to watch people grow and see the look on their faces when they accomplish something new that they never imagined they could do.”

Broken Spoke Stables

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Left photo: Tammy’s uncle, Don Mason, rides a registered Rocky Mountain horse named Cherokee. Don and Cherokee have ridden many miles exploring the mountains of Garrett County. He has also been instrumental in the improvement of numerous trails and bridges in Potomac State Forest and other surrounding state properties. Known as ‘Uncle Don’ to everyone at the stables, he inspires others to realize that quality riding is possible even as we grow in age. As a genuine horseman, with an eye for a good horse, Don loves to stop along the trail to just ‘sit for a spell’ and take in the magnificent views that are best seen from the back of a horse.

Watch for the Spring 2016 issue of Mountain Discoveries for extended photos and article featuring “Horseback riding the State Forests.”



Julie Turrentine with her quarter horse Charlie.

Circle R Ranch

Written by: **Sara Mullins**
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Above: Koley Richard and Mattie O'Brien getting to know Fitz with Hailie DeWitt aboard. Left: Duke patiently waits for his next trail ride.

Another local, family-owned stable offers horseback riders a different experience. At Circle R Ranch, they can enjoy private, guided trail rides through 90 acres of hillsides, woods and fields near Deep Creek Lake. The Ranch's 48 horses represent a wide range of breeds that are trained to work with all levels of riders. The Ranch uses Western saddles. Free tours allow visitors to meet the horses.

Open year-round, Circle R offers rides of varying lengths — 30 minutes, 45 minutes, 60 minutes and 90 minutes. Fifteen-minute pony rides are also available. "A Day at the Ranch" for ages 10 and up allows visitors to shadow the staff at feeding time, or work directly with the horses by brushing, saddling and otherwise caring for them. Birthday parties can include trail or pony rides and the use of a pavilion with picnic tables at the barn. The pavilion is also available for other celebrations. Visitors can enjoy private hayrides with evening bonfires afterwards during the summer and fall. One-horse, open sleigh rides are offered in the winter, depending on weather conditions and sufficient snowpack.

"We want to share this experience of our animals with those who don't have this outside of their kitchen windows," says Dana Richard, who owns and operates the business with her husband Jim. Her grandfather bought the farm in 1944 from his Uncle. He kept a few dairy cows and a couple of horses. Dana's father added more horses for recreation.

Dana and Jim are now raising their three daughters on the farm, along with some beef cattle and dairy cows. "We are a small family business," Dana says. "We have no employees. All of our help comes from family, friends and volunteers."

Circle R welcomes volunteers age 13 and up who are willing to work on a regular basis at least six days per month. In return, they can earn riding time. Volunteers range from locals to seasonal visitors staying in Garrett County for extended periods. "Most of our helpers are horse-crazy girls," Dana says. "One of our volunteers is a retired school teacher."

Circle R Ranch

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