



**BUCKINGHAM TEEN USES SWEET 16 TO ‘PAY IT FORWARD’ BY FUNDING EQUESTRIAN THERAPY FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

**CHESTER SPRINGS, PA – MAY 12, 2013** – When budding equestrian Isabella Schmidt wanted to turn her sweet 16 party into a fundraiser, she asked her Mom for help. Together, they enlisted the support of 80 family and friends, inviting them to celebrate while donating to **HOPE SPRINGS EQUESTRIAN THERAPY, INC.** in lieu of birthday gifts. By the evening’s end, Isabella had raised nearly \$2100 to bring the wonders of equestrian therapy to children with disabilities.

“When my parents asked me what I would like for this special birthday, I told them that I wanted to spend time with family and friends,” says Isabella. “As I thought about my feelings for riding and what joy and confidence it has given me, I thought how great it would be to give that joy and happiness back by making someone else feel as I do. My mother always says ‘Pay it forward’ – and so I began my journey, researching places that have horses and help people. That is where I found Hope Springs!”



Pictured (right to left): 16-year-old Isabella Schmidt, father Neil, Hope Springs founder Elena Gonzalez Shaffer and mother Denise.

Hope Springs Equestrian Therapy was founded in 1997 to improve the quality of life children and adults with disabilities through therapeutic riding. At Hope Springs, students and their families receive customized care in a consistent, nurturing environment that fosters healing, growth and empowerment. Our dedicated staff, volunteers and 8 gentle therapy horses strive to make a positive difference in every rider’s life – but we could not do what we do without the generosity of supporters such as Isabella.

“What Isabella did was truly selfless and completely in the spirit of philanthropy,” says Hope Springs founder Elena Gonzalez Shaffer, who attended Isabella’s party on April 27<sup>th</sup>. “What struck me the most was the energy that she and her family threw into the party, and their heartfelt understanding that doing so would make a difference. Isabella has set an amazing example for young people her age. I wouldn’t be surprised if her classmates follow suit and find ways of giving on their own.”

Isabella’s drive to help others comes naturally, passed down from her parents, Denise and Neil Schmidt. “My mother Denise is and will always be my role model,” explains Isabella. “I may have chosen Hope Springs, but it was my Mom who led me down the path to ‘Pay it forward.’ I am very thankful to my friends and family for all the donations they made to Hope Springs, and to my father Neil for supporting me in my decisions and having so much faith in everything I do. But if it wasn’t for my Mom, this party would not have happened. She went above and beyond to make everyone happy; there will never be anything I can do to thank her enough.”

Funds raised at Isabella’s party will cover the cost of nearly 40 therapeutic riding lessons for children who would not otherwise be able to afford equestrian therapy. Said Hope Spring Executive Director and Senior Instructor Jeannie Knowlton, “Isabella’s understanding of non-profit struggles goes beyond her 16 years. She has watched her parents help other small organizations and has now begun to establish herself in that same role. The funds that Isabella raised at her party will not only help with day to day expenses, but also let students in need of scholarship reap the benefits of the unique therapy that horseback riding at Hope Springs can provide.”

When Isabella first wrote to Jeannie, expressing interest in Hope Springs as the beneficiary of her sweet 16 party, she said, "If I can make a difference in just one child's life that would truly be special." Congratulations Isabella – our thanks to you and your parents, and the family and friends who donated to Hope Springs at your party, for helping to improve the quality of life for MANY riders with disabilities.

**About Hope Springs Equestrian Therapy, Inc.**

*The mission of Hope Springs is to enhance the quality of life of individuals with cognitive, physical, emotional or behavioral disabilities by providing them with affordable therapeutic riding and associated special education of the highest possible quality, in a warm, safe and supportive environment. To learn more about our programs and view photos of our riders demonstrating what they have accomplished, please visit us on on-line at [www.Hope-Springs.org](http://www.Hope-Springs.org) or [www.Facebook.com/HopeSpringsOrg](http://www.Facebook.com/HopeSpringsOrg), call 610-827-0931, mail PO Box 156, Chester Springs, PA 19425, or visit us at 1105 Green Lane Road in Malvern, PA.*

THE RIDERS OF HOPE SPRINGS



**HOPE SPRINGS EQUESTRIAN THERAPY, INC.**  
A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION; MEMBER, PA COUNCIL ON THERAPEUTIC HORSEMANSHIP  
PA ASSOCIATION OF NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

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