

# With Heart and Purpose: Barn Dance Fundraiser Returns to Support Local Programs

SANTA BARBARA, CA, UNITED STATES, May 6, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Hearts Therapeutic Equestrian Center will host its annual Barn Dance Fundraiser & Auction on Saturday, May 16, from 5 to 8 p.m. at The Carriage & Western Art Museum, 129 Castillo Street in Santa Barbara, to raise support for equine-assisted services for children and adults with disabilities, veterans, and other community members.

“The Barn Dance is one of the most important nights of the year for Hearts because it allows the community to see, celebrate and sustain this work,” said Andrew Wilson, Board Chairman of Hearts Therapeutic Equestrian Center. “Every ticket, donation and auction bid helps keep these programs within reach for local families, supports the care of our horses and strengthens the place where participants come to build confidence, connection and independence.”

The evening will include dinner, live music, a featured live auction package, silent auction packages, raffle prizes and a paddle raise supporting Hearts’ Summer Camp Scholarship Fund. Proceeds will help fund scholarships, horse care, facility improvements and year-round programs that make equine-assisted services accessible to people of different ages, abilities and financial circumstances.

Founded in 1985, Hearts is the only nonprofit equine therapy center in south Santa Barbara County. The organization was created to inspire, strengthen and motivate people of all ages and capabilities through programs built around the connection between humans and horses. To date, Hearts has served more than 7,000 children and adults and engaged about 4,240 volunteers, creating a positive ripple effect estimated to touch the daily lives of about 31,000 people.



**SAVE THE DATE!**  
Saturday, May 16, 2026  
5pm - 8pm  
The Carriage and Western Art Museum

**Barn Dance**  
*Fundraiser & Auction*  
an evening of support for equine assisted services to inspire, strengthen, and motivate people of all ages and capabilities.

Hearts Therapeutic Equestrian Center  
Barn Dance 2026

In 2025, Hearts received the City of Santa Barbara's Nonprofit Champions of Accessibility Award for its commitment to inclusion, accessibility and equitable opportunities for people with disabilities.

This year's featured live auction item is the Central Coast Luxury Escape, including a two-night stay at The Ritz-Carlton Bacara, golf and lunch for four at Alisal Guest Ranch, and exclusive wine country tastings in Santa Ynez. The silent auction will include seven packages featuring Santa Barbara and Central Coast experiences, including family activities at the Santa Barbara Zoo, a hotel stay at the Santa Barbara Inn with coastal cruise tickets on the Double Dolphin, Paso Robles wine tasting and a Pismo Beach getaway, along with several stand-alone auction items.



Andrew Wilson, Board Chairman

Each guest will receive one complimentary raffle ticket upon arrival and may choose among three prize packages. Additional raffle tickets will be available during the event. Guests will also enjoy a barbecue dinner from Oak & Fire and live music by Caught Red Handed.

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*Andrew Wilson, Board  
Chairman of Hearts  
Therapeutic Equestrian Center*

The event will include remarks from Jessica Simon, a Hearts participant who has Down syndrome and served as a Special Olympics Global Messenger in 2016. Simon has previously spoken publicly about the role Hearts has played in helping her manage anxiety, develop confidence and experience support through her connection with the horses and volunteers.

At Hearts, participants work with trained instructors, volunteers and therapy horses through equine-assisted services that can support physical, emotional, cognitive and social development. The program includes adaptive riding and ground-based work designed to help participants build communication, listening, patience, empathy and confidence.

“First and foremost, our participants are learning horsemanship and riding skills, but the work reaches far beyond the lesson itself,” said Kelly Gould, Head Instructor and Program coordinator at Hearts Therapeutic Equestrian Center. “Horses offer a special kind of connection. They help people feel seen and supported while they practice skills that can carry into daily life, from communication and focus to confidence and trust.”

Hearts’ herd includes 16 specially trained therapy horses and also provides a home for rescue and senior horses that might otherwise have limited options. Since its founding, Hearts has cared for more than 100 horses.

The organization relies on donor support to maintain accessible programming.

Contributions help cover the cost of scholarships, horse care, instructor support, volunteer coordination, facility needs and equipment. Support from the Barn Dance helps Hearts continue serving participants who benefit from therapeutic riding, adaptive horsemanship and connection with horses.

Hearts leaders say the fundraiser also helps introduce new community members to the organization’s daily work, including the volunteer teams who assist in lessons, care for horses and support participants as they work toward individual goals. The Barn Dance is designed to be accessible to longtime supporters and first-time guests, with opportunities to give through ticket purchases, auction bidding, raffle entries, direct donations and the paddle raise. Organizers said the event reflects the community partnership that has sustained Hearts for nearly four decades.

The organization’s programs are designed to meet participants where they are, with instructors adapting each session to individual needs, goals and comfort levels. For some riders, that may mean balance and coordination. For others, it may mean emotional regulation, confidence, communication or a stronger sense of belonging.

Top sponsors for the 2026 Barn Dance include Mission Equine Associates, Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians, Kittle Motorsports, Montecito Bank & Trust, Marabella Stable — A Gaited Community, Lexus of Santa Barbara, The Lieberman Family, Jim and Chana Jackson, Reid and Robin Cederlof, The Weintraub Family, Sandy Lovett and Duane Harsh, Carol Kallman and Don



Kelly Gould, Head Instructor and Program Coordinator

Barthelmess, Lynn P. Kirst, Petrine Day Mitchum and presenting wine sponsor Pelletiere Winery.

Tickets for the Barn Dance Fundraiser & Auction are available at [Hearts Barn Dance 2026](#). Donations may be made at [Hearts Donations](#).

As a 501(c)(3), Hearts Therapeutic Equestrian Center relies on the generosity of donors to maintain its life-changing programs. Contributions directly support scholarships, horse care and facility improvements, ensuring that individuals of all abilities have access to the transformative power of horses.

### About Hearts Therapeutic Equestrian Center

Founded in 1985, Hearts Therapeutic Equestrian Center is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization providing equine-assisted services that inspire, strengthen and motivate children and adults with disabilities in Santa Barbara County. Through partnerships with trained instructors, volunteers and specially selected horses, Hearts creates opportunities for healing, growth and empowerment. For more information or to make a donation, visit [heartsriding.org](http://heartsriding.org) or email [info@heartsriding.org](mailto:info@heartsriding.org).

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