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News Release

For Immediate Release

First Graders Read to Horses

Valley Water Mill Equestrian Center is partnering with the Walmart Foundation and area schools to promote literacy and horsemanship among grade school students.

First-graders from Springfield Public School's Campbell Elementary will put the two skills together when they read aloud to horses at the Valley Water Mill Equestrian Center Wednesday, Nov. 7, at 9 a.m.

The Equestrian Center has implemented the Horse Tales Literacy Program, a reading program which has introduced tens of thousands of young readers to the world of horses through books by Walter Farley, author of the classic children's book, "The Black Stallion."

Each student involved in the program is given a their own copy of "Little Black, A Pony," a cliff-hanger picture book by Farley, which they read in their classroom. Students also visit in the classroom with Equestrian Center staff about horses, ponies, horse safety and the importance of reading. Afterwards, students go outside and meet a real live "Little Black" pony, brought to their school playground by Equestrian Center staff.

Six to eight weeks later, the class takes a field trip to the Equestrian Center to read portions of their books aloud to "Little Black" and other horses.

"The most exciting part of the field trip is getting to read their favorite part of the book to the horses," said Lynn VandenBerg, Equestrian Center Coordinator. "There also will be rotational learning stations covering nutrition, grooming, saddles and tack and making a wish upon a horse."

Before they leave, students receive a second book, "Little Black goes to the Circus," further encouraging reading and interest in horses. The students are allowed to keep both books.

The Horse Tales Literacy Program is made possible at the Equestrian Center through a partnership with the Walmart Foundation's Volunteerism Always Pays, which helps fund and provides volunteers for the program. The program also has a curriculum for 4th and 5th grade students.

For more information about the Horse Tales Literacy Program, visit horsetalesliteracy.org.

For more information about Wednesday's field trip, call Lynn VandenBerg Valley Water Mill Equestrian Center Coordinator, at 417-833-3291; or Jenny Fillmer Edwards, Public Information Administrator for the Springfield-Greene County Park Board, at 417-874-2176 or 417-224-5510.