

Mount de Chantal to Offer Equestrian Studies

Partnership with Bethany's Peace Point Equestrian Center will provide facility

By LINDA COMINS
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WHEELING — Officials of Mount de Chantal Visitation Academy and Peace Point Equestrian Center signed a formal agreement Thursday to utilize the Bethany center's facilities and faculty for an equine studies concentration at the Wheeling private school.

Dr. Becky Johnen, head of school at Mount de Chantal, said, "We do envision this as an international program," potentially attracting students from across the country and around the world. She added that a family in England has already expressed interest in the new endeavor.

Gene Valentine, a Bethany College graduate who has developed Peace Point Equestrian Center, said his goal is "to make it (Peace Point) a community resource to all the four-year colleges, junior colleges, high schools and private schools" in the area. He said the equestrian center, now in its third year of operation, represents an investment of \$14-\$15 million.

Valentine said Peace Point Equestrian Center has 54 employees, working full- or part-time. He said his investment in the community is extending to a second farm, located on the Catholic Knights of America property in Wellsburg, which Valentine envisions developing for assisted living, elder care and nursing home components. Valentine said plans for the Wellsburg property will be ready to be announced in about a week.

Mount de Chantal officials do not have any projections at this point concerning the number of students they anticipate attracting as a result of the new program, Johnen said, but added, "We hope to be as successful as the



Photo by Linda Comins

Signing a formal agreement to offer an equine studies concentration at Mount de Chantal Visitation Academy in Wheeling on Thursday are, from left, Gene Valentine, owner and developer of Peace Point Equestrian Center, Bethany; Ellen Fischer, executive director of the equestrian center; and Dr. Becky Johnen, head of school at Mount de Chantal. The new program is set to begin in the fall of 2007.

program at Bethany College." She said that 15 percent of this year's incoming freshman class at the college enrolled as a direct result of the Peace Point equine studies and pre-veterinary programs.

Johnen said the equine studies program, to begin in the fall of 2007, will become the fifth concentration in the Mount's pathways program for personalized curricular development. Currently, the independent school offers con-

centrations in music, art, science and social studies.

Mount students enrolled in the concentration program will complete course work required for the academy's college preparatory diploma and will take electives and some required courses related to equine studies, Johnen explained. Equine-specific courses will be taught by Peace Point faculty and will be offered both at Mount de Chantal and at the equestrian

center, she said.

In addition, Johnen said Mount de Chantal leaders are having ongoing discussions with Bethany College officials regarding the possibility of offering "early-entrance" college courses.

Under the joint venture with Peace Point, Mount students will be able to take equine-related classes and participate in equestrian activities at any age. Ellen Fischer, a Bethany graduate who serves as executive director of Peace Point Equestrian Center, said youth can participate in riding and join the United States Pony Club. In their junior year, Mount students may enter the equine studies concentration.

Mount de Chantal and Peace Point will promote the program jointly. Johnen expects it to be marketed in Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina and other areas where residents are interested in horses.

Students from the tri-state area can participate in the program at any age. "If they are from out of the area, they can come here as early as seventh grade and be boarding students," Johnen said. Currently, the Mount does not accept boarding students below seventh grade.

Boarding students at the Mount could board their horses at Peace Point, Fischer added. The equestrian center has 150 permanent stalls, 200 temporary stalls, two indoor arenas and three outdoor riding rings, Valentine said.

Students in the Mount's equine studies concentration will take courses such as equine husbandry, horsemanship, horse management and science courses that affect the care and understanding of horses. At Peace Point, training is offered in all disciplines: English, Western, Driving, Dressage.