

## **Loan will aid work..**

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BETHANY - A new loan will help continue the work started by Gene Valentine at Bethany College's Peace Point Equestrian Center.

Sunset Mortgage Co. has committed to giving a \$3.5 million bridge loan to the center. The money will be used to continue construction at the center and restructure debt incurred by Valentine, a 1972 Bethany College graduate, for what he has already built.

Already in place at the center are a 160- by 210-foot indoor show arena, two outdoor arenas, pastures and barns. The \$3.5 million loan will be used for the construction of a new 160-foot-by-310-foot indoor arena, and outdoor western events arena, six additional barns, a tack shop, a veterinary annex and a pre-veterinary school, which are scheduled for completion in 2006.

Ellen Fischer, executive director of the center, said those planned projects are just the first stage in the ultimate goal for the center. She said also planned is a five-star restaurant, rebuilding the round barn that once stood at the Peace Point entrance, timeshare properties and an assisted living facility.

Valentine said the restaurant could be a place for culinary student internships and the assisted living facility would be a place for health care students to get hands-on experience.

Nick Ripley, vice president of finance for the center, explained that a bridge loan creates a bridge for the center to obtain other loans. Valentine said a \$4.95 million rural development loan guarantee for the center is pending with Ameribank of St. Clairsville and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In its first year of operation, college officials have said the Peace Point Equestrian Center has been doing well. Fischer said 22 incoming freshmen have indicated they chose to attend Bethany this fall specifically because of the center and majors related to it. She said that number will triple the total number of students in the equine studies major.

Students attending Bethany will be able to major in equine studies, which has two tracks of equine management and pre-veterinary medicine. A third track of equine competition and instruction is planned for a later time.

Also, Fischer said the school did very well for its first year of equine competition. The 15-girl team came in fourth in three competitions, finishing behind only West Virginia University, Penn State University and Pittsburgh University.

"We did just great," said Fischer.

The school's team is being instructed by Kerri Gregg, who has been given an instructor rating of A by the U.S. Pony Club. Fischer said only approximately 1 percent of Pony Club riders in the U.S. are given the rating of A.

The college will also host an endurance trail ride on Oct. 1 and 2. Fischer is expecting 80 to 100 entries for the endurance ride, during which riders will ride either 25 or 50 miles each day of the two-day event. She said there may be some Olympic hopefuls also at the ride.

Fischer said she would like to develop, with the addition of a rodeo arena, competitions in roping, penning, barrel racing and more.

Students in the equine studies program learn everything there is to know about horses, including how to work with horse teams, cart-pulling horses, hunts, horse showmanship and more. Students will also learn about the practical aspects of horse care including medicine, farrier skills, baling hay, equipment care and other needed skills.

Valentine said the center already has 32 horses and 25 students have signed up for the program, which will begin in the fall.