

Cowboy's Community Event Supports St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

By: Mandy Boggs

The local horse community came together on February 20th for a little fun and a lot of fundraising for Rich Bradshaw's St. Jude Children's Research Hospital Benefit Ride at the Geauga County Fairgrounds. For the past few years, Rich Bradshaw, a well-known cowboy who has been training horses and riders for over forty years, has been putting on this charity event for riders (and non-riders). As many riders in Northeast Ohio suffer through a long winter of not being able to ride their horses as often as they may like, Rich kicks off the end of winter with this annual event. Held in the indoor arena at the Geauga County Fairgrounds, the event is referred to as the "Annual St. Jude's Indoor Trail Ride". Riders from all over bring their horses for a day of fun, and the chance to ride in a comfortable setting out of the elements. As our typical winter weather is anything but predictable, the event had to be postponed from the original date due to frigid temperatures and heavy snow the weekend before. Mother Nature was kind on the new date, as participants showed up in sweatshirts and asked if they could ride outside this year! It was a beautiful sunny day, with temperatures going well over fifty degrees.

Unfortunately, the warmer temperatures eliminated any snow on the ground. In the previous two years, the highlight of the event was skiing and sledding while being pulled around by some of the cowboy's on their horses. People of all ages looked forward to this, as Rich is great for encouraging the faint of heart to step out of their comfort zone and "Just Have Fun!" From little kids waddling around in their snow pants, to grandparents laughing harder than they may have laughed in years, while Rich yelled, "Hang on!" before galloping his horse across a snow covered field, hoping they listened when he asked them to hang on tight.

The warmer weather and lack of snow didn't stop the largest group of attendees yet, from having a great time. Over fifty horse and rider teams rode at least one or more miles, with twelve riders hitting the Five Mile Mark! Riders counted laps around the indoor ring, or a measured mile of riding around the Fairgrounds property. Many riders collected pledges from friends and family to donate towards each mile they rode. To add some excitement and make up for the lack of "sledding by horsepower", some great friends of Rich brought something a little different to this year's event.

Jim and Beth Rider, brought their team of Percheron (Draft) horses for demonstrations and as part of various raffles, offering up the chance to climb aboard the wagon and actually drive the team of horses yourself. The "Drive The Drafts Raffle" had the largest amount of tickets purchased as it seemed everyone at the event was hoping for a chance at driving the towering pair of beautiful black horses, an opportunity that doesn't come up every day, even for those involved with horses. Six people won the raffle and all drove the team. One would assume the kids would be the most excited about this, but by size of the childlike grins on most of the adult's faces, it was a close call on who was actually the most excited about winning.

As at any event put on by Rich Bradshaw, the games were one of the most entertaining parts of this event. The crowd consisted of many riders, many non-riders, and family of all ages who came out to have fun and support the cause. Rich had games to include those without horses, one of which was

perhaps a little crazier than some participants signed up for. His annual Frozen “Horse Apples” Toss, does not use the type of apples you may be thinking of. “Horse Apples” in this case, are frozen balls of manure. Remember how I mentioned the warm temperatures this year? You got it right, these “apples” were not frozen this time around. If you have ever wondered what a building full of grown adults laughing so hard they are in tears looked like, you could have seen it on February 20th in Rich Bradshaw’s arena. The amount of actual competitors in this game was unsurprisingly, pretty slim. One young fellow quickly decided he wasn’t cut out for this cowboy life when Rich told him it was his turn to pick up a “horse apple”, suggesting “Just squeeze it together to firm it up a bit.”. As it squished together in the boy’s hand, with a look of disgust quickly taking shape on his face, he looked to Rich for some suggestions on what to do next. Rich simply replied, trying not to laugh, “Well, reach down and pick up another one!” With the look of defeat and longing for the nearest sink with soap and water, the young cowboy decided he would leave this challenge to the ladies. You could tell who the “horse girls” were as they effortlessly reached down, laughing with tears in their eyes, and aimed the squishy “horse apples” as they tossed them across the way into a bucket. Susan Vesely and Michelle Martin, the two winners this year, proudly accepted their cash prize.

This year’s St. Jude Benefit Event was a hit, even without the snow. In 2014 they raised a little over \$1,800, and \$2,600 in 2015. This year, they raised well over \$3,000 with additional unknown amounts donated directly online by people from around the country, who couldn’t attend in person. Supporters brought pot luck dishes, shared hot dogs and burgers, and too many sponsors to list, including Schneider’s Saddlery of Chagrin Falls, Ohio, donated items to be part of the Chinese Auctions and Raffles. This year had the most items in the auction than ever before. St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital looks forward to this event every year, as the large donation that comes from the Rich Bradshaw event helps so many children in need. St. Jude’s donates specially made t-shirts to the event every year, for participants to show off.

To see hundreds of pictures from this event, video clips, and to stay in the loop regarding upcoming events that are family friendly, be sure to follow Rich’s Facebook page at www.facebook.com/RichBradshawTraining . If you would like to contribute to the event, you can donate directly to St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital by going to their website www.stjude.org , where you can also see other ways you can help, or donate by phone by calling 800-805-5856.