

is still an active member of the Josephine County Sheriff's Mounted Posse and the Kiger Horse Association Registry. Jani also participates in Search and Rescue operations using her mustangs.

Jani has adopted several mustangs from the wild through the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro program. She has trained and exhibited many mustangs for other owners, including a spectacular Kiger mustang stallion. Jani says the prominent freeze brand marking on the necks of all BLM adopted mustangs is a great conversation opener, and gives her a chance to tell people about these wonderful horses.

Jani uses mustangs in her work moving and managing cattle and horses on the ranch on East Evans Creek where she and her husband live. In September, 2008, she was one of 200 trainers selected to participate in the 2nd Annual National Extreme Mustang Makeover in Fort Worth, Texas. Each trainer was assigned a mustang recently captured from the wild, and had 100 days to train the horse before competing in Fort Worth for \$50,000 in cash prizes. After the competition, the horses were auctioned off to the highest bidder, with proceeds going to support the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro adoption program.

"I felt very privileged to be selected for the 2008 competition,"

says the 43-year old trainer. Some 400 trainers from around the country applied and only 200 were chosen. When she decided to apply for the competition, she said "It was not about the prize money. I just want people to know about the mustangs, and the Mustang Makeover is a wonderful way to promote these horses I have come to admire." She says mustangs are intelligent, strong, sure-footed, athletic, and versatile. "They are survivors. They reason. They're not spooky. They don't like to waste energy. They're very honest, not conniving or deceitful when they relate to you." Once you gain their trust, she says, the mustangs love attention, and they love to work.

Jani traveled to the BLM facility near Reno in mid-June to pick up her wild horse for the competition, a strong, stocky four-year-old dark bay gelding. She named him D.LaRue, in honor of her good friend and mentor, Dewayne LaRue, who died in 2007. She says her work with "Rue" progressed easily. "He is an exceptionally kind, quiet horse. He is very inquisitive, and wants to be with people. He likes to learn, and he learns quickly." "I was riding him in 22 days." Knowing him now, she says, she probably could have ridden him sooner, but she did not want to push him. She advanced only as quickly as she felt he could handle. "He was walking



Jani drives Rue past scary tarp and barrel.

right up to us the first day we had him home." She began with simply letting him adjust to his new home and to her. She slowly began introducing him to groundwork commands in a round pen, teaching him to stand for grooming, and to lead. As he accepted each phase she would introduce new activities or new stimuli, such as saddling and bridling, obstacles like tarps, barrels, and objects flapping in the breeze. She soon had him sidepassing, walking over logs, and even going on short trail rides with other riders, horses, and dogs. "With Rue's kind nature and calm, level-headed temperament, he is going to be one very nice little horse when he is finished," she says.

After 100 days of training, Jani and Rue traveled to Fort Worth. By then Rue was crossing streams, walking over tarps, loading in a trailer, opening gates under saddle, moving calmly at all gates and doing flying lead changes, all with calm confidence. She had mixed emotions at the competition. She was confident, but nervous; excited but apprehensive. The Will Rogers Event Center in Fort Worth is a huge equestrian complex with stables and multiple arenas that seat thousands. All competitors were judged in multiple categories, including overall condition of the horse, an in-hand trail course, and a final under-saddle course. Rue received the highest possible rating in the condition category and one of the highest ratings in the in-hand trial, putting them in 4th place. They had a good run on the under-saddle course and finished 33rd overall out of 65 competitors in the Legends Division, the toughest one.

As with most trainers in last year's event, she became very attached to her assigned mustang. She had to compete with other bidders at the final auction, and was not sure if the price would stay within her range, but in the end she was able to buy the horse she had grown to love.

"Everyone was so supportive of each other. The other trainers, the organizers, and the sponsors were all so upbeat and positive. It was an experience of a lifetime." She was able to share the trailer haul to Texas with Cassi Soule from Roseburg, another trainer who also was competing. She is quick to credit friends, family, and local businesses who helped with donations of gear and money to help cover the substantial expense of hauling a horse across the country. "We could not have

done it without all the support."

The September 2008 event marked the second year for the national mustang training competition, sponsored by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the Mustang Heritage Foundation. Similar regional events are springing up around the country. In fact, Jani will be competing again in March 2009 in the Northwest Extreme Mustang Makeover in Albany, Oregon (visit <http://extrememustangmakeover.com> for more information). The event not only demonstrates the athleticism, talent, and versatility of America's wild horses, but proceeds from the auction are used to support the management and preservation of America's wild horses.

After the stress and expense of the National competition last September, Jani says she sometimes questions the wisdom of doing another one so soon. She says she and Cassie have asked themselves "Why are we doing this again?" It's all about the horses, she says. They are so strong and versatile. She wants to help increase awareness of the potential and talent of mustangs in hopes of encouraging qualified horse lovers to adopt one of these "living legends" through the BLM's program. "The thing about these wild horses is they teach you as much as you teach them." Jani says it is definitely a team effort. Jani picked up her NW Makeover Mustang in Hines, Oregon on December 4. She has until March to gentle and train him for competition at the Northwest Horse Fair and Expo in Albany on March 20-22, 2009. Several of the other trainers who will be there were also at the Fort Worth competition. "This will be my second Mustang Makeover and it will be fun knowing some of the other trainers there. I am looking forward to it!"

As part of its management program to keep wild horse herds at manageable numbers, the BLM initiated the Wild Horse and Burro adoption program that enables members of the public to adopt one of these horses from the herds managed on public rangelands. To learn more, visit http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/wild_horse_and_burro.html.

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Annette Parsons is a retired soil scientist living in the Applegate Valley with her husband, a small vineyard, two mustangs, a mule, and three cats.

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