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# THE MIDWEST EQUESTRIAN

SPRING 2021  
COMPLIMENTARY



LOWDEN-MILLER STATE FOREST  
HAFLINGERS  
RECONNECTING WITH RIDING

Two years ago Jen Piecz, a riding instructor in Woodstock, Illinois, bought the Haflinger mare Mesmerize MJW, or Mimi. The horse is registered with AHR and her pedigree is quite impressive. Her sire, Nordtirol, jumped 5'3", setting a world record for the breed. Mimi's dam, Maserata TOF, set a record for the highest selling filly. Both are from the A stallion line. "I've learned that breeding counts mentally and physically," says Piecz, who teaches foundational horsemanship on the ground and under saddle. "The ones with the paper and solid breeding for good temperament are money well spent."

So far, Piecz has introduced Mimi to obstacles, dressage, and trail riding. And to a real-live roundup. But not of cattle. When a neighbor's pair of standard donkeys made a mad dash for the soybean field next door, Mimi came to the rescue. She rounded up the long ears and helped corral them, a newly discovered talent. "I'm very happy with her," Piecz says. "She's bold under saddle, and a confident trail horse." Plus, Mimi is personable. "She's friendly and in your pocket. She wants to be right there, nuzzling you."

One place of prominence for the Haflinger is in therapeutic riding programs. It seems like just about every barn has a Stony or Goldie gracing their farm. "I fell in love with the breed in 1999 when I visited Tudor Oaks Haflinger farm in Barrington," says Meggan Hill-McQueeney, President and COO of BraveHearts Therapeutic Riding & Educational Center in Harvard and Poplar Grove, Illinois. "They looked like stuffed animals," she says of her initial meeting. But it was more than looks that won her over. It was Gunther, a 2-year-old Haflinger with only 90 days training, whose gentle, quiet spirit and easy-going personality did it for her.

When Hill-McQueeney took over the helm at BraveHearts 10 years ago, she wanted to add some Haflingers to the program. On a trip to Deer Haven Farm, a renowned Haflinger breeding farm in



Kevin, a student at BraveHearts Therapeutic Riding & Educational Center in Poplar Grove, IL, checks Neal's girth.

Lexington, Kentucky, she was privileged to choose a couple of favorites to add to the BraveHearts herd, courtesy of owner Rachel King, who had terminal cancer. Hill-McQueeney chose Buddy and Sara, a gelding and mare. "They are remarkable little horses, extremely tolerant and kind."

Averaging 14-some hands, Haflingers are good mounts for children, yet strong enough to support a small adult. What they lack in height, they more than make up for in heart.

The horses at BraveHearts are tolerant of riders with balance issues, challenging behaviors, or loud outbursts. "They have such good manners," says Hill-McQueeney. "Ours are unflappable."

Many therapy horses relish the job they have to do. Mo, a Haflinger donated to BraveHearts by Tudor Oaks Farm, was one of them. He was still sound, healthy, and working right up until he passed away



Haflingers are much sought after in therapeutic riding programs for their unflappable demeanor and willing attitude.

in 2020 at the age of 37. "The breed is phenomenal as hippotherapy, therapeutic riding, and Special Olympics horses," says Hill-McQueeney. She is a PATH (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International) Master Instructor and United States Equestrian Federation Para-dressage coach.

Not only do the Haflingers at BraveHearts engage in the typical equine-assisted services, but they also join other horses in the Trail to Zero Program, a 20-mile ride to build awareness for the skyrocketing suicide rate among veterans. They have been ridden down Michigan Avenue, around Wrigley Field, and even under the El tracks in Chicago with trains rattling overhead. "Because they're so solid mentally and physically, they do great around traffic," Hill-McQueeney says.

If there's one downside to Haflingers, it might be their somewhat lazy nature. The upside is that the rider has a bit more of a challenge. "They require you to make sure your skills are on point. You can use that to sharpen and refine a rider's aids," says Hill-McQueeney. Piecz has found that Mimi can be a bit stubborn or sticky, as she calls it. "But once she understands what you want and it's a routine question, she's very light and responsive."



Mimi has the classic Haflinger flaxen mane and tail, and burnished golden coat.

### Golden Inside and Out

Before she passed away, Rachel King gave BraveHearts a parting gift—her favorite Haflinger named Neal. "He is drop-dead gorgeous with dark, liquid brown eyes that melt you, and a beautiful forelock and mane to match," Hill-McQueeney says. But it's his happy attitude and desire to please that make him so valuable. "He would go to the ends of the earth for you," she says. "He is as golden on the outside as on the inside. **He is worth his weight in gold.**"

### Fun Facts

- A Haflinger filly named Prometea was the first horse to be cloned in 2003.
- The brand for registered Austrian studs is an edelweiss flower with an H in the middle.
- Haflingers crossed with Arabians and Andalusians are called Arabo-Haflingers.

#### LEARN MORE

- American Haflinger Registry: [haflingerhorse.com](http://haflingerhorse.com).
- BraveHearts: [braveheartsridding.org](http://braveheartsridding.org).
- Contact Jen Piecz at: [Face2facewithhorses.com](http://Face2facewithhorses.com).



Haflingers have kind eyes and beautiful markings.