

Mini Horses Big Hit At Nursing Homes

The veterinarian said odds were against Romie the miniature horse surviving past his first day, but 3 1/2 years later, the tiny horse happily hobbles into area nursing homes to lift spirits of the residents.

Jeanne Murphy first took Romie to the local nursing home when he was just 2 weeks old and fit easily in her arms. He's not much bigger now at 22 in. tall and 112 lbs. He climbs into the back of her minivan for trips. Born a dwarf with arthritis, a twisted spine, misaligned teeth, and very crippled legs, Murphy knows Romie is on borrowed time. But he loves the nursing home visits as much as the residents appreciate him.

"He wanders in and starts the loving. He's very intuitive about which people need attention," she says. "It's a good outlet for the residents – to touch warm creatures seems to lighten their moods."

Romie has a few favorites, including a 101-year-old lady who knows the right place to scratch behind his ears. He makes his rounds from person to person, passing by one lady who doesn't like any animals, and pushing the wheelchair of another resident who is busy talking and doesn't notice Romie right away. The residents comment about his

tail dragging on the floor – by at least a foot – and talk about their own horse experiences.

Murphy also takes other horses that are smaller than the standard 34-in. height of miniatures. If they fit in the minivan they can go, she says.

Recently Derri, a 7-month-old silver buckskin pinto, visited a palliative care unit. She put her chin on one lady's pillow so she could pet Derri, and was impervious to the sounds of the machines in the room.

"Miniature horses are so mild tempered and different than other horses. They can be nervous, but they don't take it out on their handlers," Murphy says.

She says miniatures must be treated and trained like any other horse, though they need less feed and never need to be shod. They are perfect for young children who can play with and ride on them.

Murphy lives in rural Glenwood City, Wis., with her husband and 22 miniature horses. She encourages other miniature horse enthusiasts to volunteer with their horses at local nursing homes, daycares and other institutions.

Make sure they are healthy with updated Coggins testing and health certificates,



At 22 in. tall and weighing just 112 lbs., Romie the miniature horse is small enough to climb into the back of a minivan for trips to area nursing homes.

she advises. Clean and brush the horses thoroughly. Protect them from slipping on floors with available shoes for horses. Because she can't find shoes to fit Romie's misshapen hooves, Murphy wraps his in vet wrap.

She also takes them outside when she sees they need to urinate. There have been only

a couple of occasions when a horse left a "gift" inside on the tile floor, Murphy says, and nursing home staff graciously took care of it.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Joanne Murphy, Pinata Miniatures, 1669 State Rd. 128, Glenwood City, Wis. 54013 (ph 715 265-7008; www.freewebs.com/pinataminis).

Portable Cement Block Machine Heading To Haiti

By Bill Gergen, Senior Editor

"I built it to help the people in Haiti rebuild their schools and churches. It'll turn out concrete blocks at the rate of 3 per min.," says Chester Fisher, Augusta, W. Va., about his portable cement block making machine.

The trailer-mounted machine measures 16 ft. long by 7 ft. wide and weighs about 4,000 lbs.

"It lets anyone make high quality blocks right on the job site. It works fast and can be easily moved around," says Fisher.

Fisher has been doing missionary work in Haiti for the past 30 years. He started a nonprofit mission organization called Fisher's International Missions. "We take medical teams into many countries, including Haiti, and we build churches," he says.

He first built an 8,000-lb. drilling rig to help Haitians dig fresh wells. But then the earthquake hit Haiti and a lot of buildings went down. "It was like everything had just disintegrated – I rarely saw anything that looked like a block," says Fisher. "The type of block used in most of the buildings was totally inadequate."

According to Fisher, one reason for the poor block quality is that there are no inspectors in Haiti. "People were cheating on the cement used in the blocks. Even after the blocks set, you could often pull them apart with your bare hands. I don't think 100,000 people would have died if their building materials had been made properly."

Another problem was the blocks weren't always uniform in size, which made the buildings unstable. "I decided we weren't going to build any more churches until we could get a machine that made better blocks," he says.

Fisher's onsite machine will also reduce the number of blocks lost during transport. "The roads are so rough in Haiti that about 15 percent of the blocks break up and can't be used. This way workers can pull the machine onsite and make blocks right at the job site."

He hopes to ship the machine to Haiti next May. "It'll go to a gentleman who will keep 4 families busy making blocks to sell for a living. When anyone needs a church or school built, they'll move the machine to the job site and make the blocks there," says Fisher.

He says a lot of thought went into building the machine. "I first had to build a miniature



"It lets anyone make high quality blocks right on the job site, and works fast," says Chester Fisher, about the portable cement block making machine he made to help Haitians rebuild their schools and churches.

model. It had to be built heavy in order to survive Haiti. I want it to last 20 to 30 years."

The cement mixer holds 3 wheelbarrow loads of aggregate. Power is provided by a Yanmar 32 hp diesel engine, which drives a double hydraulic pump. Control valves are used to raise and lower the mixer; to rotate the mixer; and to operate a vibrator that mixes the cement before it's poured down a chute and into the molds.

"If the operator wants, he can also use it to make the mixture for the building's foundation. Once the foundation is done he can make the blocks," says Fisher.

A big "steering wheel" on one side of the machine is used to rotate the cement mixer into position so the cement and aggregate mixture can be dumped down a chute and into the block mold.

The rig is equipped with a 50-gal. hydraulic oil reservoir and a 50-gal. water tank. The water is used both to make the block and to clean up the rig when done.

"I painted the inside of the mixer with the same stuff that's used in pickup bedliners, so

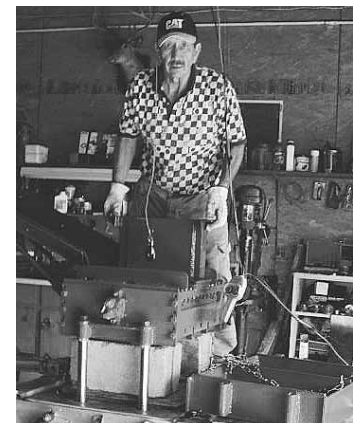
the cement won't stick to it," says Fisher. "It works perfect."

Before building the machine, he went to Cumberland Block, a local block making company, to observe their process. The company donated the block mold, which is worth about \$10,000.

"It'll cost us about \$10,000 just to get the machine to Florida on a ship and out of customs. We don't have the finances in our mission organization to make this happen." By the time the block-making machine is completed, Fisher says it will have cost between \$20,000 to \$25,000 so he's looking for donations.

"Middle River Church of the Brethren is our partner in our work. Financial donations can be sent to Middle River Church of the Brethren Haiti Mission Fund at P.O. Box 17, New Hope, Va. 24469."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Chester Fisher, HC 71, Box 188BB, Augusta, W. Va. 26704 (ph 304 496-9841; www.Fishersinternationalmissions.org).



Block mold on machine turns out 3 blocks per minute.