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0. [Main Navigation](#)

[« Horses](#)

FACES AND PLACES: Horsewoman, Krista Montgomery

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MANVEL, N.D. — Horses have given Krista Montgomery the ride of her life.

Whether the rural Manvel woman is training horses or teaching her students at MonteRay Ranch equestrian skills, Montgomery simply enjoys spending time with the equine species.



"I can't imagine having a life without horses," said Montgomery who owns MonteRay Ranch with her husband, Shawn. An accomplished horsewoman who has won hundreds of awards at area, regional and national horse shows, Montgomery now focuses on teaching other people the finer points of riding. She also trains and boards horses.

This year the Red River Horse Show Association recognized Montgomery for her contributions to the area's horse industry, naming her 2009 Horsewoman of the Year. Thirty-two years ago her mother-in-law, Annabel Montgomery, who founded MonteRay in 1971, received the same honor.

Receiving the same award as Annabel makes it even more rewarding, Krista said.

"I thought it was very special because of the continuity of a single business, of the Montgomery family, of the heritage of the ranch."

Her late mother-in-law worked tirelessly to promote horses and to make sure they were accessible to children and adults, no matter their physical limitations or their level or income, Krista said. Annabel was the one who sparked Krista's own interest in horses when she was a child.

The ride begins

Krista learned to ride on Annabel's horses when she was about 12 at summer recreation classes in Oslo, Minn. The Montgomery family hauled their horses to Oslo a couple of times of week back then, Krista said, and after taking a few lessons, she wanted a horse of her own.

After pestering her father, Earl Mallinger, for a couple of years, to buy her a horse, he finally consented. Her first horse was an Appaloosa gelding named Chipper, which she rode in area horses shows. After watching her ride for a few years, her dad realized that Krista's love for horses wouldn't dissipate and he was sold on horses, Krista said.

Because she lived in town she boarded Chipper at MonteRay Ranch. When she was a teenager she started working at the ranch and helping with its summer equestrian camp.

After graduating from Oslo High School in 1980, she attended UND for a year then attended Findlay College in Findlay, Ohio and in 1984 earned a degree in equestrian studies. She returned to Manvel and married Shawn Montgomery, Annabel's son, that same year. They lived on a farm on the southwest edge of Manvel near the Turtle River for the first several years then moved to the MonteRay Ranch which had been closed for several years.

By that time, she and Shawn had three children who were horse enthusiasts and they wanted them to have a place to ride that didn't get flooded every spring like their place on the Turtle River did. She and her family had no sooner moved their own horses to the ranch when people started asking her if they could board theirs, Krista said.

Busy ranch

About 80 horses now live in six barns at Monte Ray. Besides daily chores such as barn cleaning, grooming and feeding horses, Krista teaches dozens of riding lessons each week. Helping people hone their equestrian skills and accompanying them to horse shows is even more rewarding than winning trophies herself, she said.

"This is fun and there are people who need me... It's more rewarding than the accolades I could get."

Her human students have competed in levels from youth 4-H to national adult shows and the horses she's trained have been sold by their owners to customers across the United States.

"In the last six months, we've sent horses to, in addition to North Dakota and Minnesota, Cape Cod, Mass., Tulsa, Okla., Terra Haute, Ind., Grand Rapids, Mich., and Wichita, Kan."

Krista takes seriously her role as an advocate for the horse industry. She believes horses are good for the soul. As a mother, she's seen the positive influence horses have had on her own three children. Owning and showing horses taught them responsibility, how to win and to lose gracefully and helped them develop self-confidence.

Krista also has witnessed the bond that has developed between her students and their horses and how that has transformed the lives of some who were experiencing physical and emotional challenges.

"If there's not a resident cheerleader in this area, we will diminish the odds that horses will be a part of their lives."

She feels lucky to be a position where she can do the cheerleading.

"I really love horses and I really love people. How lucky I am to walk right out the door and into my dream job where I have interaction with horses and with people every day."

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