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Construction students build zoo home

After almost four years without a home, ASU's Hunkapi Horse Program will take up residence later this month at Phoenix Zoo, thanks in large part to students in the Del E. Webb School of Construction, a part of the Ira A. Fulton School of Engineering.

The school's Associated General Contractors (AGC) student chapter has led a three-and-a-half year building project on a 5-acre site donated to the equine therapy program by the zoo in 2004.

The opening of the first phase of the facility was completed Oct. 24. The students are completing the excavation, foundation, framework, electrical and plumbing work for a barn and riding arena.

A second phase of the project will involve construction of an administration building and a hay shelter. The third phase will include a parking lot and landscaping.

"This would have never happened if it weren't for the help of the construction school," says Terra Schaad, the therapy program manager.

"These kids are awesome," says Debbie Crews, founder of the Hunkapi (pronounced "hoon-KAH-pee") program. "They've made it work. We can't thank them enough for their hard work and enthusiasm."

The program was established as a research project in 1996 by Crews, an assistant research professor in ASU's Department of Kinesiology. Today it serves as many as 350 children and adolescents each week who struggle with emotional and behavioral issues, such as autism and attention-deficit disorder.

The program uses the reciprocal relationship that forms between a horse and its rider to demonstrate to children and teens the effects of their attitudes and behaviors – which are mirrored by the horses, Schaad says.

In addition to the benefit of being located close to ASU's Tempe campus, Schaad says the new facility will foster a sense of community within the program.

"A centralized facility is really important, not just for the clients, but for the staff, too," she says.

Crews approached the AGC student chapter in 2004. Trae Ripplinger, then director of the student chapter, began finding donors and organizing the project. He later handed the effort to the group's next director, Mac Costas.

Costas, who now is a construction school alumnus, is still working on the project through his employer, Markham Contracting.

"This is a great opportunity to get onto a building site and work with people who are well-trained," Costas says. "It's one thing to read about all the parts and pieces of a construction project and get tested on it. It's another thing when you actually come out (to the construction site), figure out what the problems are, and put something together."

Along with Costas, construction students Mike Broughton and Wes Morrill form the core of the group of students working on the building project. Together, they organized each aspect of the project's development from the ground up. More than 20 students contributed work to the project in the past few years.

When the facility's original design plans were deemed too expensive, the students sought out a quality pre-fabricated structure to house the horses and equipment. But before the structure could be erected, much work needed to be completed on the ground.

The students organized volunteer services for site grading, concrete pours and digging – often completing hours of

preparation work before the volunteers showed up. A tight schedule called for long workdays, often in hot weather. Ultimately, the hard work of students and volunteers made the project successful, Costas says.

"This is clearly a student-driven project," says Matt Eicher, manager of industry relations for the construction school and faculty mentor for the students involved in the Hunkapi project. "We stepped in largely at the end to make sure they had their ducks in a row – and they did."

The student team enlisted the help of 18 valley companies, including Rummel Construction Inc., Hurricane Holes, Sundt Inc., Markham Contracting Co., and Cemex. The Local 394 Concrete Finishers and Masons union also provided volunteer workers.

For more information about the Hunkapi Horse Program, visit the Web site www.hunkapi.org.

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