

People and places

LIFE

Frances Lowe • flowe@winchesterstar.com



Militia musings

A record of everyday happenings of the 31st Regiment of the Virginia Militia from Frederick County has been transcribed by Sammy Copenhaver.

Full story D3

The
Winchester Star
Saturday
September 9, 2006



They're just horsin' around

By TERESA DUNHAM
The Winchester Star

FREDERICK COUNTY — With a cowboy hat perched on his head, sturdy boots, worn jeans, and a full moustache that curls up on the ends, Bill Schwasta looks like a real cowboy.

His trademark dark sunglasses — so dark that you can't see his eyes even if you stare — are the only part of the ensemble that seems to break the mold.

Yet, all it takes is a glance down at Schwasta's huge oval belt buckle with "Aspen Colorado" branded into the metal to see that Schwasta isn't just putting on a show.

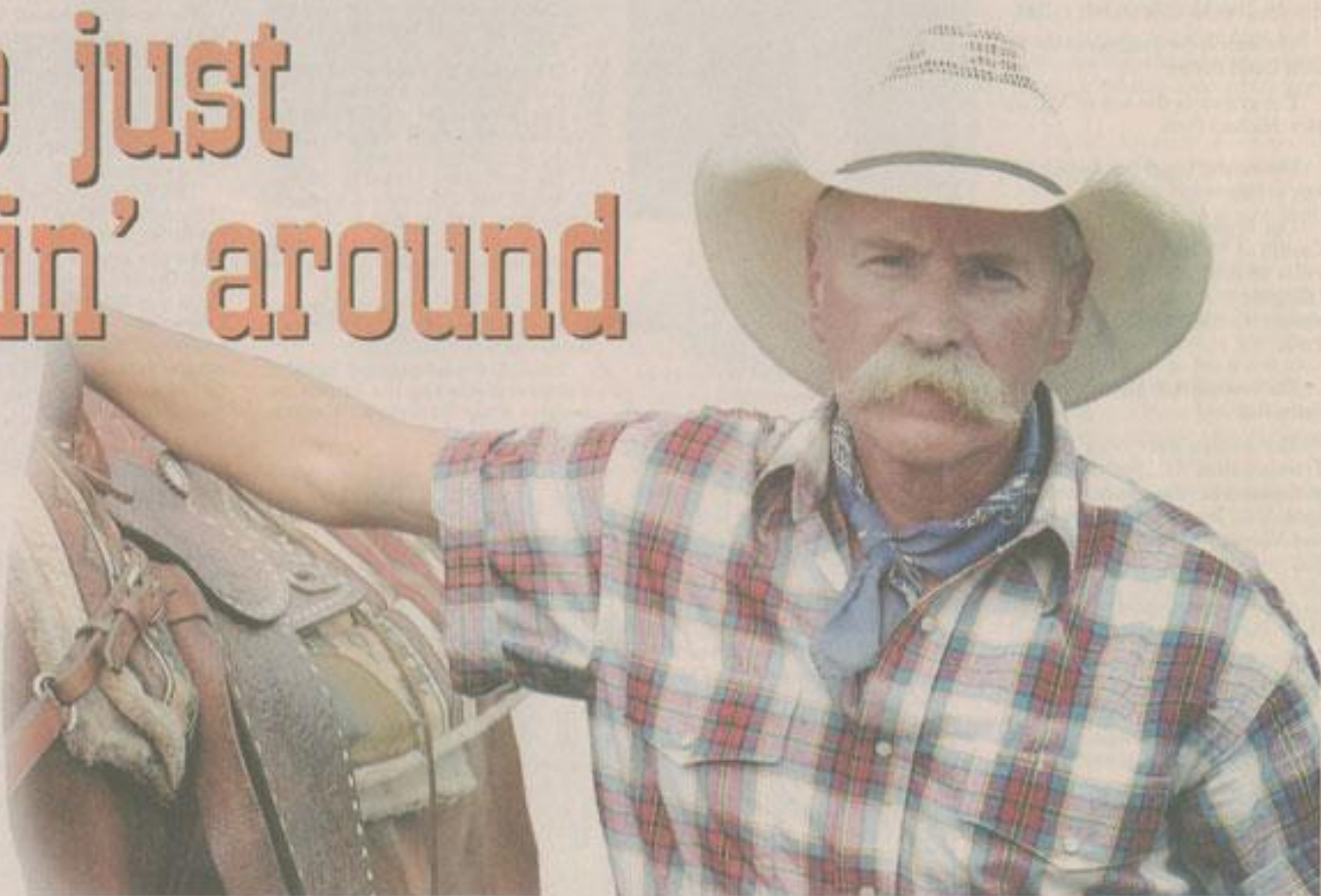
He worked on plenty of dude ranches out west in his younger days and rodeoed in Colorado, Montana, Wyoming — and he's got the scars to prove it.

"That was Cody, Wyoming, 1980," says Schwasta, pointing to a mashed up elbow. His body is like a rodeo storybook, from the collarbone to the tip of his toes.

"Before you can be old and wise, you've got to be young and stupid," he said.

In lieu of frankincense and myrrh, this lone wise man comes bearing a horse and a grin.

He can ride both bareback and saddle broncs, but folks who visit his Rocking S Ranch on Glaize Orchard Road in Frederick County don't have to feel intimidated.



RICK FOSTER/The Winchester Star

Bill Schwasta, owner of Rocking S Ranch in Frederick County, worked on plenty of ranches in his younger days and competed in rodeos in Colorado, Montana, and Wyoming.

He's got gentle horses for gentle people, spirited horses for spirited people ... and for those who don't like to ride, he has horses that don't like to be ridden.

Schwasta and his two young children, Hayley and Shane, opened the ranch because they thought the area needed another recreational activity.

Ever since 2004, his 25 horses — with names like Trooper, Dallas, Del Rio, and Star — have been giving guests a giddy-up good time.

When Schwasta takes groups out on trail rides, he's always turned sideways so he can carry on a conversation. He keeps the group's safety in mind — but you'd better believe he has fun in the process.

Forsaking flat land, his trail riders go up and down hills that look surprisingly less steep and intimidating once the horses are halfway up or down the slope.

For a special treat, he might even let the group ride through the shallow end of a creek.

He can accommodate groups of two to 15 — and his guests include everyone from corporate types and school groups to people involved with county government and the judicial system.

"It's amazing the different people I've met in this area. There's no rhyme or reason to who likes horses," he said.

Besides his trail rides, which cost \$30 an hour, he also gives lessons that range from \$35 to \$45 an hour.

"I am affording people in this area to be a part of the sport with as much frequency as they want without the cost of owning a horse," he said.

Fulks can ride 12 times a month and still save more money than if they actually owned a horse, he said. Plus they don't have to worry about watering, feeding, or paying vet bills.

In addition, he provides therapeutic riding opportunities.

For example, one of his students, Kristie Pullen, 16, of Stephenson gives lessons to a young autistic boy

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BUCK FOSTER/The Winchester Star

Rocking S Ranch in Frederick County is the only local place where people who don't own horses can go on trail rides. Schwasta and his two young children, Hayley and Shane, opened the ranch because they thought the area needed another recreational activity.

Galloping to find trail rides

By TERESA DUNHAM
The Winchester Star

WINCHESTER — Finding a facility that still hosts trail rides could send a person galloping all over the county.

"Liability insurance is almost double for people who have the trail rides," said Claudia Swisher, interim-president of the Frederick County Virginia Equine Network.

Besides the Rocking S Ranch in Frederick County, Swisher said the only other local place where people who don't own horses can go on trail rides is in Front Royal.

Even horse owners have a hard time finding new areas to take their own horses on trail rides, she said.

"In Frederick County we have gotten to the point of having very few places to do trail rides," she said.

The main places that she could think of were the Cove Campground, the State Arboretum of Virginia at Bland Experimental Farm, and parts of George Washington National Forest.

*George Washington National For-

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named Jimmy.

"Jimmy always gives me hugs. Riding the horses, he knows *hey, they listen to me*. He gets really excited about coming out," she said.

Pullen, who does work around the ranch in exchange for lessons, usually rides Del Rio.

"You get close to your horse. They all have personalities. You can tell which horses are friends with each other," she said.

In addition to getting close to her horse, Pullen has also made a friend

named Crickett Higgins.

Like Pullen, the 15-year-old from Clear Brook does work on the ranch in exchange for lessons.

She says trail rides are the best way to see the country side.

"I think riding is relaxing. You're looking everywhere at all of the scenery," said Higgins. "I could do this forever."

For information, call 540-678-8501 or visit www.therockingsranch.com.

Contact Teresa Dunham at tdunham@winchesterstar.com.



RICK FOSTER/The Winchester Star

Crickett Higgins stretches the leg of Starlight as Kristie Pullen watches. The girls help Bill Schwasta at his Rocking S Ranch.

Ride

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est has a great amount of bridal trails and parking," said Swisher, but most are in Shenandoah County.

Area battlefields sometimes have trail areas too, she said.

Other than that, horse owners sometimes seek out farmers who wouldn't mind letting them ride on a few acres.

As for people who don't own horses but want to take lessons, Swisher invites them to visit www.fcven.com or e-mail the equine network at info@fcven.com.

Contact Teresa Dunham at tdunham@winchesterstar.com.