

Horses find niche in business world

This story is one of a series profiling finalists in the Horowhenua-Kapiti Electra Business of the Year Awards.

By DAVID HAXTON

Like any boss you want to get the most out of your workforce.

You could shut your employees in a boardroom for a couple of days while someone bombards them with positive statements.

Or you could pack them into a bus and direct the driver to Sudbury Fields in Te Horo for the day to meet Andrew Froggatt and Janine Sudbury and their horses.

The couple have created Talkinghorses, a business concept that tries to make company people become better leaders by gaining trust and respect in horses.

They've shown that connecting humans through horses can unleash staff potential, build strong leaders and a powerful team.

They had trialled the concept in front of business leaders and gained so much positive feedback they knew they were onto a winner.

So they bought a hectare parcel of land in Te Hapua Road.

"As soon as we walked out onto the farm we knew it was the place," Ms Sudbury said.

Over the last three years they have steadily transformed Sudbury Fields by adding fencing, stables, holding yards, a round yard, dressage area and even hired a contractor for a week to mulch five hectares of land.

Starting off with three horses the stable has grown to 19 now; all are station bred horses mainly from Gisborne, Queenstown and Christchurch regions.

Mr Froggatt gives a horse whispering demonstration and then

the business people are each given a horse to undertake about a dozen exercises with such as teaching a horse to keep its distance to guiding it through an obstacle course.

"Unless the relationship is strong the horse won't go," Ms Sudbury said.

This year they've really started to market their business including a taking a horse to Frank Kitts Park in Wellington and giving a horse whispering demonstration in front of about 250 business executives from the Wellington Chamber of Commerce.

The business, which won the branding and image award in this year's Electra Kapiti Horowhenua Kapiti Business Awards isn't only focused on the corporate companies.

In August they will be running their third horsemanship course: a two-week programme focused on breaking in horses.

They would like to set up a similar business in Britain, helping problem horses worldwide appeals and exporting some of their horses is a possibility.

They also want to create a conference facility on the farm as well as a luxury farm stay cottage where people can experience a horse whispering holiday.

Ironically the couple met in an environment where strong staff relationships are made - the pub.

Ms Sudbury was working in England for the BBC eight years ago as a radio reporter and newsreader before she decided to take a year off and travel the world.

She was only going to be in New Zealand for a few months but has been here ever since after meeting Mr Froggatt at the Molly Malones bar in Wellington.

As well as helping her partner with the business she still finds to work part time for National Radio.

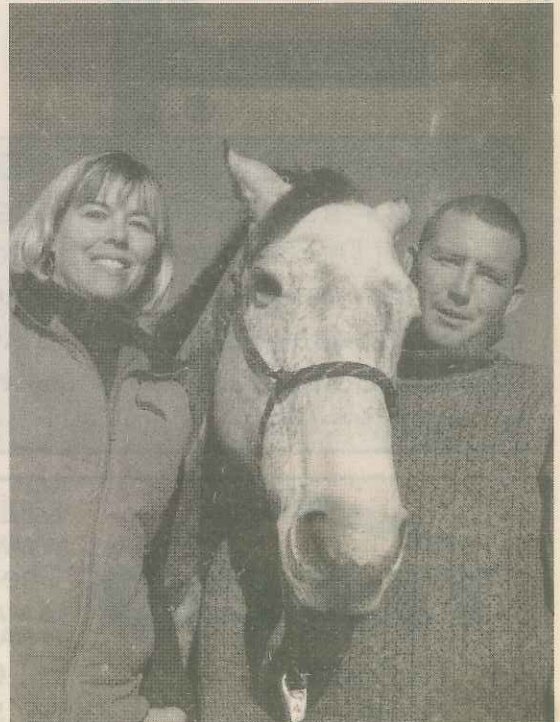


Photo: David Haxton k899-07

Talkinghorses owners Janine Sudbury and Andrew Froggatt with Lulu.