

Painted Pegasus

A Nebraska businesswoman uses her Paint to empower women.

By Abigail Wilder



COURTESY DENISE MARYANSKI

Denise Maryanski and Sure Is A Cowboy

Denise Maryanski knows a thing or two about achieving goals. The 55-year-old entrepreneur from Papillon, Nebraska, has started and grown several successful businesses, including Quiet Control Brand Products, since age 14. Today, one of her passions is the PEGASUS Leadership Program, a seminar she developed to encourage women to reach their goals. With the help of Denise's Paint Horse, PEGASUS is a hit.

Sure Is A Cowboy is one of two horses Denise uses in her program. She purchased the 1994 sorrel overo gelding four years ago after having to euthanize her first Paint mare when she lost her battle with osteochondrosis (OCD). Denise had co-owned horses for many years with her son, an equine veterinarian, but she wanted her very own Paint Horse.

"My personal passion is Paint Horses," Denise said. "I found [Cowboy] and I said, 'that's it!' I had a list of everything I wanted in my dream horse and he fit the bill: tall, smart and handsome—a real cowboy!"

"The Cowboy," as he is called, is a former show horse with 10 Register of Merits and 191 lifetime points. Denise retired the gelding from the show ring when she acquired him and made him a star in her program.

Denise's PEGASUS program evolved from two of her other businesses. She created a company called Omega Paints and Quarter Horses LLC and gives private, confidential riding and groundwork lessons in clinics called In Harmony with Your Horse. Last winter, a student complimented Denise for getting her horse to obey. After encouraging the girl to take ownership of what she actually was able to do on her own, a light bulb went off.

"PEGASUS came about because I've done sales and motivational training for many years in the real estate field," said Denise. "I

thought, 'why not incorporate that training with the [In Harmony] clinics I've been doing?'"

The PEGASUS Leadership program is not specifically designed for equestrians. It uses interaction with horses to help women discover communication, leadership and problem-solving skills. Each three-hour session guides 12 women through the seven facets of the program, with the goal of encouraging them to embrace a "herd" mentality, set and achieve goals and enjoy a positive atmosphere with other women.

"Women are under a lot of stress today," Denise said. "They can come here and recharge their batteries. I show the women that if they can handle an 1,100-pound prey animal, they can accomplish anything—as long as they break it down into parts. And no woman leaves my program without a sense of achievement."

Participants in PEGASUS have ranged from age 11 to age 76, and come from all walks of life. Corporate and real estate companies have sent their employees to Denise for continuing education.

Part of the allure is because of Denise's horses. The Cowboy and her husband Tony's 18-year-old Quarter Horse Cal—collectively known as "the boys"—are great teachers, and patiently work with the women.

"Cowboy has a huge, big, fun personality," Denise said. "He can actually do anything you put in front of him. He has not only been a trainer for me, but he's been a trainer for others."

Even though riding is not emphasized in the seminars, Denise has found that many of the 60 women who have participated in her program desire to pursue their newfound horse interests.

"I love the fact that I'm able to work with women who have not had the opportunity to be around horses," said Denise. "And so many of them are looking into buying a horse and coming out to ride with me." 