



A Horse Oasis in the City

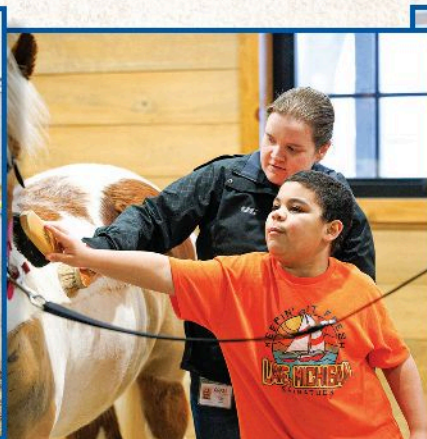
Hestóvin Stables Brings Healing and Hope Through Icelandic Horses

Nestled quietly on the corner of East Paris Avenue and Lake Drive, where the city gives way to a peaceful stretch of green, Hestóvin Stables Therapeutic Riding Center stands as both a community treasure and a haven of healing. With five enchanting Icelandic horses, a passionate team, and a heartfelt mission, this boutique nonprofit has quickly become a powerful force for good—transforming lives, one lesson at a time.

Founded by longtime educator Laura Huizenga, Hestóvin Stables offers a unique blend of individualized adaptive riding

lessons, horsemanship training, and equine-assisted learning experiences. Every 50-minute private session is carefully crafted to meet the needs of the rider and is led by a PATH International Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor. Whether it's a child with a disability learning to communicate through gentle cues or an adult seeking peace through connection with an animal, the lessons here go far beyond the saddle.

"I love merging my passion for teaching with my love for horses," says Huizenga. "Hestóvin means 'Horse Oasis' in Icelandic—and that's truly what this place is. A place of calm, connection, and care."



From Preservation to Purpose

In 2019, when Huizenga learned that the historic horse farm she had admired for years might be sold for condominium development, her heart sank. But what began as heartbreak quickly turned into hope. After a serendipitous trip to Iceland and an unexpected call from the property owner in early 2020, Huizenga took a leap of faith. She purchased the land in June 2021, acquired her first four Icelandic horses that fall, and officially opened the doors to Hestóvin Stables in September 2022.

The 7.5-acre property, once home to the Grand Arabian Horse Farm for nearly four decades, is now thriving once again—with new life, new purpose, and the same enduring charm.

"This land has been a horse farm for more than 70 years. To keep it green and full of life feels like a gift to the whole community," says Huizenga.

The Icelandic Advantage

What makes Hestóvin truly unique—beyond its personalized, one-on-one approach—is its herd of Icelandic horses. Small but strong, friendly, and remarkably intelligent, these horses are perfect partners in therapeutic riding. Their smooth "tölt" gait provides a stable and comfortable ride, particularly beneficial for individuals with mobility challenges.

Each of Hestóvin's five Icelandic horses—Gunnar, Sær, Tatari, Glóa, and Jórda—brings a distinct personality to the barn. Together, they help facilitate everything from Equine-Assisted Learning workshops to mindfulness events like Horses in the Moment, and even reading programs such as Read to a Horse, which encourages young readers to build confidence in the presence of a calm, nonjudgmental listener.



A Growing Community of Connection

In just two years, Hestóvin has grown from a dream to a vibrant community hub. The team has expanded from three to eight dedicated staff members. Student enrollment has increased from one to 24, with plans to reach 30 this fall—and a growing waitlist speaks to the impact. Volunteers, too, have multiplied—rising from five to 58—and now form the backbone of barn chores, events, and lesson support.

From the cheerful Donuts with Dads mornings to festive gatherings like Horse and Treats, Yule Lads, and the annual Summer Carnival (coming up July 26), the center offers more than lessons—it creates lasting memories.

"We've been called a beautiful venue where horses happen to live," Huizenga laughs. "And I'll take that as a compliment."

A Mission that Matters

At its core, Hestóvin Stables exists to enhance the lives of children and adults through the healing power of therapeutic horsemanship. The center intentionally subsidizes all lesson costs and offers scholarships to ensure affordability and accessibility.

"We know horseback riding can be expensive," says Huizenga. "But we also know the transformative power it holds—for physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing. That's why we work hard to remove barriers."

Whether supporting individuals with disabilities, veterans seeking emotional healing, or families just looking for a gentle place to grow, Hestóvin delivers hope in a tangible way. Even the surrounding community feels it. Nurses from the nearby medical buildings often spend their lunch hours visiting the horses. Patients recovering from surgery take comfort in views of the peaceful pasture.

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An Invitation to Experience the Magic

"I invite the community to come visit us," Huizenga says warmly. "Come for a barn tour. Meet the horses. Sit on the porch in an Adirondack rocker and just breathe. Or watch the horses grazing in the back pasture. You might even get to taste a piece of Icelandic chocolate."

And if you're lucky, you'll hear a child giggling atop Tatari, exclaiming, "I feel like I'm in a fairy tale."

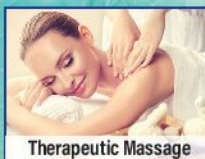
In a world that can often feel chaotic, Hestóvin Stables reminds us that peace, kindness, and healing are still possible—sometimes, with a little help from a horse.

To learn more about Hestóvin Stables Therapeutic Riding Center, schedule a tour, or support their mission, visit www.hestovinstables.org

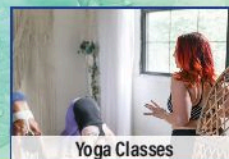


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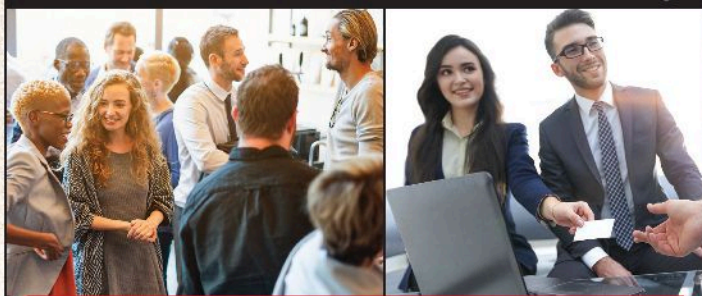
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