

OPINION

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'It's the right thing to do'

Mother-daughter duo 'green pioneers' at Sand Hill Stables in Shalersville

Although she may not think so, Ginnie Shaw, owner of Sand Hill Stables in Shalersville, is a pioneer. In 2006, with the purchase of what was formerly farmland, she set herself a unique challenge: to build a first-rate riding facility that employed conservation methods in every aspect of the project literally from the ground up.

To start with, the land itself needed restoration. The open acreage was planted with warm-season prairie grasses whose roots descend 20-25 feet and prevent erosion. Cool-season pasture grass was planted on most of the property, and electrobraided fencing powered by solar generators was installed to separate the pastures. Ginnie's daughter Betsy, who has taken up the reins of managing the stable, has created a rotation schedule moving the boarded horses from one pasture to the next to prevent overuse of the grassland.

In 2008 Sand Hill Stable received an Ohio Alternative Energy grant to help defray the cost of installing solar panels in the roof of the south-facing barn. The two large photovoltaic panels are tied to the Ohio energy grid and generate almost half the energy needed at the stable for heat and light. Ginnie admits that due to the newness of the project here in Portage County and the technical challenges, it was a long and difficult process.

The good news is that there is plenty of sun throughout the year to provide a significant amount of energy. In fact, the system is most efficient in the winter when the temperature drops to 25 degrees. The bad news is that snow, not clouds, is the greatest impediment to the panels' efficient operation. Nevertheless, the Shaws, never flinching at the challenge have developed an elongated scraper to remove the snow.

According to Alan Frasz, President of Dove-tail Solar & Wind, Ginnie was an early-adopter of solar energy in northeast Ohio. With the price of materials dropping rapidly in the last 18 months, many new barn-owners across the state are now embracing this technology.

It seems there is no end to the thought that has gone into the development of this property. In the

GREEN

PORTAGE

Helen Tremaine Gregory



winter, the horses in the paddock drink their water from solar-heated troughs.

A bat box and several bluebird houses have been set up to encourage these insect-eating critters and birds to live on the property. In 2010, a rain barrel was added to collect water for the new community garden.

This mother/daughter team, who call each other co-bosses, admits that they are learning as they go. Not everything, first tried, turns out as planned. The chickens that were going to be rotated onto the pastures in a portable coop to scatter manure, prefer to be left in one spot to lay their eggs. And the goats that were intended for weed control have been swapped out for angoras who are wool producing.

Most recently Betsy and other staff members have begun a composting program. Manure collected from the horses is mixed with bedding material from the stalls. After decomposing, it will be used for fertilizer in the pastures and compost for gardeners.

When asked why these two women want to pursue such an uncharted course, they respond unanimously that, "It's the right thing to do." Being pioneers is not easy, but with a great deal of research, a good dose of confidence, and the curiosity to implement new ideas, the Shaws have created a healthy home for the horses under their care and a model for developing an environmentally responsible business.

Helen Tremaine Gregory is a member of the Portage Park District Foundation Board.