

## Local Horsewoman Shares Experiences, Passion with Visitors at the Colony Hotel

by Anita Matson

Guests at the historic Colony Hotel in Kennebunkport have a unique opportunity to meet Lexxie, a nine-year-old chestnut Arabian mare, up close and personal, this summer.

Lexxie and perhaps her barn buddy, Fritz, along with the animals' owner, Gabriela Rodriguez, will be meeting and greeting the public on alternating Thursdays.

Together, they will be teaching people how horses live and get along with their human caretakers in a program that Rodriguez calls "Blixx - All About Horses and Their Care." Their appearances are an entertaining way for people to meet horses, ask questions and get basic information about horses and what they need.

"For many people, it is the first time they are really close to a horse," says Rodriguez. "It is especially fun to see how kids relate to the horses."

Rodriguez uses Lexxie and Fritz to demonstrate the basics of handling horses, how their instincts influence their behavior and the similarities between human and equine behavior.

She informs the audience in an informal question-and-answer setting about horse facts, such as how fast they can go, the difference between mares and geldings, their blind spot, how long they can live and anything the audience is curious about.

"I am hoping people will begin to see things



Gabriela Rodriguez and Lexxie, a nine-year-old chestnut Arabian mare, will visit the Colony Hotel on Ocean Avenue in Kennebunkport every other Thursday, beginning on July 30, at 10 AM.

from the horse's point of view," says Rodriguez.

Blixx grew out of Rodriguez's own personal journey with horses. In 1998, she started taking riding lessons in Sanford, and she was frightened.

"I wanted to overcome my fear," she says, "because I was literally shaking in the saddle." Slowly, she gained confidence, and in 1999, she bought Blue, the horse she had been riding at the stable.

A grey thoroughbred born in Ireland and registered as Take a Mile but known affectionately as Blue, he had been a race-

horse, jumper, hunter and school horse. She adopted him when he was 17.

At that time, she did not realize he had been abused. She soon found out he was not a happy horse. He did not like people and would threaten them.

Starting out as a novice both on and off horses, Rodriguez had a lot to learn. As she tried to understand him, she got kicked, bitten, dumped and run off with, but she kept trying to earn his trust and rehabilitate him. It was a

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learning process for both of them.

Over the course of a year, she studied, worked with a trainer and put a lot of time into just being with him and building a relationship.

"Bit by bit I began to learn why he did what he did," says Rodriguez. All her hard work paid off, and she and Blue went on to enjoy all types of activities – rides on the beach, some jumping, parades and shows.

Eight years ago, Rodriguez faced a new challenge. Looking for a companion for Blue, she was encouraged to buy an Arabian filly from a nearby farm. Lexxie, registered as Bint Ali Alexxis, was only six months old at the time.

Knowing nothing about raising and training a young horse, Rodriguez had to learn quickly. She started walking Lexxie around the neighborhood and working with her on the ground. To exercise both horses, she learned how to pony them – she would ride Blue and walk Lexxie alongside them with a leadline.

After years at various barns, she was able to bring Blue and Lexxie to her own backyard in West Kennebunk in 2006. Unfortunately, Blue passed away in May 2008.

Her new horse is Fritz, a 13-year-old bay Thoroughbred/Hanoverian, who was a gift from her trainer. Rodriguez has had him since last September.

Blix, a combination of



Eight years ago, when Gabriela Rodriguez bought Lexxie, left, she had no experience as a horse trainer. She learned to pony the two horses. She would ride Blue, right, and walk Lexxie alongside them with a leadline on Kennebunk Beach.

the names Blue and Lexxie, developed from her own learning experiences with her horses.

"I wanted to share the information I did not have when I started but learned along the way – the expenses, their needs and the behavior issues that were a result of the life Blue had before I owned him," she says.

Besides appearances at The Colony, Rodriguez does presentations at Atria, Huntington Common and Kennebunk Rehabilitation, as well as volunteering with autistic and developmentally challenged children.

"It has been very gratifying to take the horses to these locations and expose the people to the horses right where they live and to see their reactions," says Rodriguez.

This will be the third

season for Blix at The Colony. And while Blue will no longer be present, Fritz is being prepared to join Lexxie.

Donna Kabay, the general manager at the hotel, sees Lexxie's visit to the hotel as an innovative program that is an interesting and educational experience for the guests.

"The Colony Hotel is an environmentally responsible hotel, and we believe this includes doing what we can to advocate and advance environmentally responsible ideas and actions," says Kabay. "We are happy to have the opportunity to support and encourage a program that promotes healthy and respectful interaction between people and animals."

The program has been a great success. "The guests love it. It's out of the ordi-

nary, and they have all been very interested and curious when Gabriela arrives with her horses at the front of the hotel," says Kabay.

Being able to see and touch a horse up close has been a unique experience at the hotel. Kabay says, "Gabriela is wonderfully sensitive to the horses and communicates this to others in an entertaining way. It is especially good for the kids. It shows them how to interact with animals with respect and to recognize that animals do have value over and above what is normally considered."

Rodriguez and Lexxie will be at The Colony Hotel on Ocean Avenue in Kennebunkport on July 30 and August 13 and 27 at 10 AM. The program lasts about 1½ hours; admission is free and the public is welcome.