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Numerous activities keep her jumping



Dr. Kathleen Neuhoff cares for one of her patients, Anabelle, at Magrane Pet Medical Center. Besides working as a veterinarian, Neuhoff also is a South Bend podiatrist. Tribune Photo/BARBARA ALLISON

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About the only sitting around that Dr. Kathleen Toepp Neuhoff ever does is in the saddle. At 53, she has returned to her childhood love of horse jumping competition - winning a big tournament in Lexington, Ky., just last fall.

But Kathleen is always jumping to it -- working as a veterinarian half her workday and as a podiatrist the other half.

Bunions, Burmese cats, bone spurs and beagles -- all in a day's work.

She co-owns Magrane Pet Medical Center in Mishawaka and has her Family Foot Care Clinic in South Bend.

"It's a 15-minute drive between jobs, and so I have a chance to shift gears," says the mother of four. As far as she knows, she hasn't yet called a foot a paw.

"But I see some of the same people at both places," she admits. "When I became a podiatrist (in 1993), many of the people whose pets I cared for at Magrane had saved their bunions for me."

She apparently gets a lot of tail wagging and nods of approval for her work.

"I'm now trying to keep my hours to about 25 at each place during the week," she says.

That gives her time for her other activities -- which include serving as an assistant scoutmaster for Troop 505 ... a lector and children's liturgy leader at St. Joseph Church in South Bend ... a board member for the South Bend Civic Theatre ... a committee member (and former president) of the American Animal Hospital Association ... and the busy mother of four children between the ages of 16 and 26.

Oh, yes, did I mention that she jumps horses -- and teaches it to 4-H'ers, too?

That all started when she was a teenager and wanted her own horse.

"My parents knew nothing about horses, but they said if I could earn the money, I could buy my own," says Kathleen, who was a straight-A student at St. Joseph's High School.

She eventually bought her Sunshine for \$150, and then she and a friend rented five acres of land and put up a fence and a barn on their own.

To pay for all this, Kathleen worked as a clerk at the old Hank's Friendly Super Market and as a coat-check girl at the old Edison Light Dance Club while also cleaning horse stalls.

Sunshine, though, was suffering from malnutrition when Kathleen bought her. Dr. Carol Ecker brought Sunshine back to health -- and gave holy heck to the original owner. "She came out and took care of Sunshine every day for a month and didn't charge me a penny," Kathleen says.

Kathleen and Sunshine eventually won the jumping competition at the St. Joseph County 4-H Fair -- without a saddle.

"So I borrowed a saddle for the state fair, and we won that, too," says Kathleen, then 17.

After high school, she worked for Ecker for a year and decided she also wanted to be a vet.

And her life continued to be a whirlwind of activity. Going to Purdue ... marrying husband Ken ... becoming a veterinarian in 1979 ... having four kids ... deciding also to follow in the footsteps of her father and grandfather -- both named Frank Toepp -- and become a podiatrist, too.

"My last child was born when I was a sophomore in podiatry school (in Chicago), and I was still keeping hours as a vet," she says.

Yet she always made sure she had enough time in her schedule to be a room mother in at least one of her children's classes.

Apparently her children admired what their mother was doing. Carolyn, 26, will graduate in June from Scholl College of Podiatric Medicine in Chicago, and Michael, 19, is in pre-veterinarian courses at Purdue.

Patricia, 23, is also a Purdue graduate and trying to make it in theater in New York City, while Matthew, 16, is a sophomore at Marian High School. Kathleen and Ken are not empty nesters yet, but during the last few years she has been able to spend more time with her horse jumping.

"My horse is House of David," says Kathleen, a member of the Battle Creek Hunt Club. "When I bought him (they have 33 acres and three other horses south of town), his name was just Dave."

Dave obviously didn't sound enough like a champion.

House of David did -- and he has become a champion with Kathleen in the saddle.

Their victory against 50 other horses at the Central District Centennial Field Hunter competition in Lexington last fall qualified them for next month's national championships in Virginia. Despite her busy schedule, she will be going.

The key to managing her time?

"Well, one thing is that I don't watch TV," she says. "The last series I really paid attention to was 'Star Trek' -- the original. It takes more than one remote to work our TV, and so I don't think I can even turn it on."

Kathleen herself remains turned on to life -- with a lot of horsepower and heart put into whatever she does.

Bill Moor's column appears on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays. Contact him at bmoor@sbtinfo.com, or write him at the South Bend Tribune, 225 W. Colfax Ave., South Bend, IN 46626; (574) 235-6072. Bill's new book of columns, "Moor or Less Volume 2: Old Soldiers, Good Neighbors and Loyal Dogs," is now available at the Tribune's front counter, Borders and most Martin's Super Markets.