

# SEWICKLEY NATIVE FOUNDS DREAMING OF THREE

By Pamela Palongue

Dreaming of Three is an unusual name for an unusual organization. The group is comprised of professional barrel racers who pledge a part of their winnings to charitable organizations. The word 'three' in the name, refers to the three barrels that the riders must circle in a race against the clock.

Though barrel racing is probably not one of the most well known professional sports around Pittsburgh, it is certainly one of the most exciting! It's typically held in conjunction with a rodeo and by all accounts, is not for the faint of heart.

As barrel racers leave the gate at top speeds, they must slow down quickly as they approach the first barrel, coming in wide at first and then tightening the circle, which is known as "making the pocket,"

before accelerating again and repeating the process on the second and third barrels. After clearing all three barrels, the rider and horse make a beeline out of the arena at breakneck speeds, and all too soon the race is over, generally in less than 16 seconds.

Although running around three barrels on a horse may sound easy enough, there are many potential hazards. If riders come in too close to the barrel initially, they can easily hit the barrels, breaking knees and bruising calves. Also, a good barrel horse will be almost horizontal to the ground as he circles the barrel, making it much easier for the horse to fall or the rider to lose their balance and tumble from their mount, a potentially dangerous accident for both horse and rider.

Quaker Valley graduate, Jackie Luffey Harris had always dreamed of becoming a professional barrel racer since the age of 12. Although some riders become professionals in the sport as teenagers, Jackie did not receive her Women's Professional Rodeo Association (WPRA) card until she was in her 40s in 2011. Her first season was filled with problems, almost before it began. She lost both her stepfather in 2010



Harris with her first Rodeo Kid, Amy LeClaire of Denver, Colo.



Dreaming of Three founder, Jackie Harris.

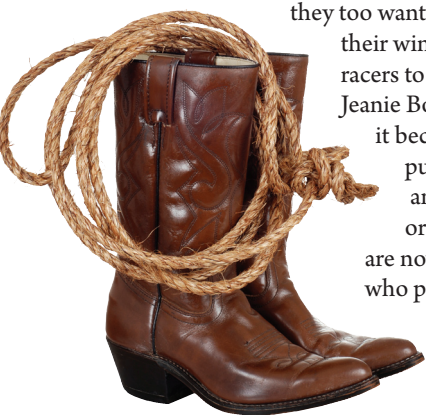




Dreaming of Three founder, Jackie Harris, racing her barrel horse, Sis.

and her father in 2011, within just a few months of each other. Also, her horse bled from its nostrils during a race, a condition called epistaxis which is usually not serious, but according to racing rules, requires a month of rest for the horse. In the midst of all of this adversity, Harris made a decision that if she was able to win money through her barrel racing, she would donate the proceeds to charity. With that first, small gesture, she was able to make contributions to the American Cancer Society and the American Heart Association in honor of her father and stepfather.

When fellow barrel racers found out about her plan, they too wanted to donate money to charity from their winnings. Two of the first professional racers to do this were Beth Penland and Jeanie Bowersock. From this point onward, it became evident that this was a real life purpose for Harris, who applied for and received non-profit status for the organization Dreaming of Three. There are now 12 riders from all over the country who participate in contributing to the organization which then distributes the funds among several charities.



People wanting to help don't have to be barrel racers fortunately. They can go to the group's website and contribute as well as buy online merchandise which also goes to fund the various charities.

"Riding for someone else is so much more rewarding than just racing for myself," says Harris who spends a great deal of her time organizing events and soliciting help for the non-profit.

One important aspect of the organization is the Rodeo Kids program. Harris finds children who are facing serious illness and takes them to rodeo events where they can meet the professional riders.

"It's so great to see these kids be able to enjoy just one day where they don't have to think about tests and hospitals. It's just about having fun," says Harris.

The big-hearted racer has also started a saddle cross collection. Friends and family of loved ones who are dealing with a serious illness or have lost someone to illness, give her the initials of their loved ones and she puts them on her horse's tack. She feels that they are there with her as she rides into the arena.

Harris is a wife and mother of two children with a full-time day job. Although she is unlikely to fulfill her dream of being a world-champion barrel racer at this point, she is right on track for championing the cause of helping others.

**For more information about Dreaming of Three, please visit the website at [DreamingofThree.com](http://DreamingofThree.com). ■**