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ADVANCE PHOTOS ■ PAULE SAVIANO

Damian Russo, 21, of Pleasant Plains, keeps a firm grip on his horse

SPECIAL RIDERS MOUNTING UP

Horsemen's show will have a new event

Saturday, the Staten Island Horsemen's Association will hold its 1999 Horse Show, featuring competitions in 51 categories. The all-day affair at Sundown Stables in Charleston will offer a little bit of everything. It will be particularly interesting, though, to check out item No. 24 on the horse show list.

The title of competition No. 24 is: "Special Olympics Walk Only." The six competitors in this category are all first-time entrants in the horse show. They are all excited and prepared. And, yes, they are all handicapped.

Since August, these athletes have been practicing at Carousel Riding Academy in Totterville, in a Special Olympics equestrian program co-sponsored and funded by the Police Athletic League.

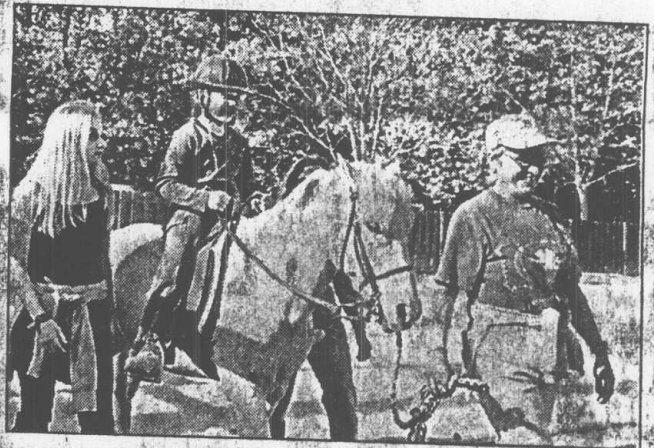


**WARREN
HYNES**

Suzanne Grande, who owns Carousel, has been instructing 35 handicapped individuals in the program.

"The program is going wonderfully," Ms. Grande said. "It's been really good for their self-esteem, coordination, leg muscles. The whole thing is keeping their eyes up and getting their balance. They're no different than any other kids."

Richard Salinardi, Staten Island area coordinator for the Special Olympics, said the equestrian program has



Jessica Mucciariello, 10, of Castleton Corners, is escorted by Lesley Bartoletti of Totterville, left, and Vicky McAvoy of Westerleigh.

added another branch to the Special Olympics tree. "We're taking advantage of the resources that we have on the Island," Salinardi said. "It's been very successful, and the volunteers have gotten involved with it."

The athletes who will compete on Saturday range in disability. There is Damian Russo, a 21-year-old Pleasant Plains resident with Down syndrome, who rides with an oxygen tank strapped to the back of his saddle; Kristina Imhof, a 10-year-old from Huguenot, who also has Down syndrome; Andrea Moore, 8, of Charleston, who is deaf; Jessica Mucciariello, 10, of Castleton Corners, who

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