

New Ways To Make Money On The Farm

Pony Ride Business Is A Family Affair

Robin and Kevin Pettitt and their family cover a lot of miles with their "pony ring" business, taking their self-contained traveling rig every year to amusement parks, birthday parties, family reunions and other various promotions.

They've been in business for 13 years. Their ponies are in demand most during the summer, when children line up for rides at small town fairs and other events.

"A lot of it is word of mouth," says Pettitt, regarding the family's ability to find work for the ponies. "People see us at different places and contact me for other jobs. Other times, I send out letters to fair boards, ag societies and companies. Sometimes, I phone to find a contact person and talk to them about the possibility of hiring us."

Pettitt says the pony ring is truly a family business, with three daughters also helping.

The family raises their own ponies. They currently have 53.

"Our aim is to raise ponies with good temperaments and good confirmation," Robin says. "We don't like them to be over 13 hands high or under 10.5 hands. They look more like small horses than ponies. One of our studs is a Welsh-Quarter Horse cross, and we also have a pinto Welsh cross and a registered Welsh stud."

The three Pettitt daughters do a lot of the

breaking and training, and the family sells ponies they don't need for the pony ring business.

They spend a lot of time with each foal right from the day they're born. They get their feet trimmed, deworming, halterbreaking and general touching to desensitize them. To get them used to distractions, Pettitt puts flags on fences and milk bottles with sand in them in the corrals to kick around.

"The girls ride them until we figure they're safe for customers. After they've worked in the pony ring for a year or two, they're really good riding ponies for kids," Robin says. "I keep a lot of brood mares and still have a 19-year-old mare that's been with me since day one."

She says mares with foals are given the year off from working in the pony ring.

The business charges \$3 per child per ride. Five revolutions around the 30-ft. dia. ring takes about three minutes, which is about average length of other midway rides, according to Robin. Sometimes the family has to share a percentage of their sales with the organization hosting them, but Pettitts always charge mileage for coming.

Length of jobs varies from four hours for a company picnic, to as long as 14 hours for some fairs where a day can start at 10 a.m. and end at midnight.

For the past seven years at Klondike days,



Robin and Kevin Pettitt take their self-contained "pony ring" to amusement parks, birthday parties, family reunions, etc. They charge \$3 per child per 3-minute ride.

Pettitts have also set up a "picture on a pony booth." Using a digital camera and a printer, they sell 3 by 4-in. shots for \$7.50 each and 8 by 10s for \$20.

The Pettitt's pony usually works in a 150-mile radius, but they have traveled as far as 445 miles.

They make their own 8-ft. fence panels to fit on the sides of an eight-horse trailer and in the back of the pickup pulling it. The panels, which are easy to set up and dismantle, are used to encircle the 30-ft. ring and also to

provide a small pen that connects to the side of the trailer for holding spare ponies. A canvas canopy ring top to shade the horses fits in a bag. The ponies are attached to the arms of a rebuilt carousel ride, which breaks down onto a trailer.

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Potting Soil Mixer

Roy Springer had asked his friend Charles Herron repeatedly over about two years to make something he could mix potting soil with.

Springer, retired, is an avid gardener and keeps Herron and other friends and neighbors in vegetables much of the summer. Finally, Herron went to his shop and put together just what Springer had hoped for.

"Most of the parts were salvaged from what my wife calls my 'collectible junk'," Herron says.

"The motor came from an old gas pump we were junking. It's probably 45 to 50 years old, but still worked fine. It's a 1/3 hp motor that turns at 1,725 rpm's," he says. "I could have used a smaller one, but this one was available."

Herron used pulleys to reduce the speed to 115 to 1, so that the drum on the mixer turns about 15 times per minute.

"I used a wood frame for the base because it was easier to use as I figured out where to put shafts, idlers, etc. I had to relocate these several times," he says.

Lawn mower wheels hold the drum to allow it to rotate freely. He made the drum out of an old 15-gal. soap barrel that he cut down to about 5 gal. He added baffles in the drum to keep the soil mixing. And the top from a 5-gal. plastic bucket fits on to keep the soil from spilling out while mixing.

"I used some old cabinet doors to make the outer ring on the drum, to stiffen it and let the wheels turn on," he says. On the back side of the drum, he bolted angle iron in such a way that it catches a stud he welded onto the pulley in his final drive.

He used old brake drum springs as tensioners for the tightener pulley for the drive belt. The belts were some he had laying around. The only new parts he bought were a couple of bearing assemblies with oil cups and four pulleys - two 9-in. and two 2 1/2-in. ones.



Belt-driven by an electric motor, drum rotates to mix soil.



Lawn mower wheels hold drum to allow it to rotate freely.

"I spent about three days working on it off and on. Most of that was in deciding where to put something next. I probably don't have more than \$40 invested in it. It works really well for him, but I'm not interested in making another one," Herron says.

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On-Line Farm Store Carries More Than 3,000 Products

If you've got livestock to take care of, check out www.wigginsinc.com for more than 3,000 animal care products, as well as a variety of other farm products. Wiggins offers everything from milking equipment (two teat and four) to the Uncle Moe Pig Holder.

The \$195 Uncle Moe is used to restrain a pig for castration, with or without the blade and sutures the company also sells. Or you may have another idea for it.

"People are always finding new and innovative uses for the equipment we sell," says Joe Wiggins, company owner. "We sold a sheep shearer to a broom making company to trim its brooms and an elastorator pliers (designed to neuter male animals) to stretch plastic covers that go on hand tools."

The most unusual sale Wiggins recalls was a woman who bought an elastorator and rings for sealing bags of vegetables for the freezer.

The site isn't limited to ear tags, tail dockers and vet instruments. Gardeners can find pruners, loppers and shears, hose repair parts and nozzles. Textile spinners can find wheels, and anyone can find a weather vane.

Wiggins started the business while working his way through high school and college. By the time he finished his mechanical engineering degree, he already had a full time business in place supplying people with all kinds of unique items. Today, he sells via a website and a traditional catalog. The Internet has been a real boon to business.

"We get orders from every corner of the world, and about a third of our business is export," says Wiggins.

Regardless of where a customer comes from, it is what Wiggins offers that makes the difference. Looking for a manual cream separator? He has a 42-quart unit for \$675. How about an egg candler or a rabbit hutch? They're in the catalog, too.

"We sell things to people with only one pig and to huge, commercial hog operations,"



This Elastorator is just one animal care product available at the Wiggins website.

says Wiggins. "Tons of people have told us they can't find these things locally, only at a show or on the Internet."

While he fell into his business by accident, it is no accident that it has grown as it has. Wiggins credits hard work, tenacity and ignorance that he needed a business plan or a line of credit. Although he admits to having had lots of problems, Wiggins says it is a formula that anyone can follow to build a business.

"I was too dumb to know that I did everything wrong," he says. "Because we started from nothing and we never really borrowed money, we just grew. This business takes hard work and lots of it, like any other business."

One area where the work has gotten harder is international sales. Since September 11th, it has become even more difficult to export certain products. Airlines won't handle anything for an unknown shipper, and Wiggins is careful about exporting products like vaccines.

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