

Finding Room for a Community of Horse Lovers Behind the 710 Freeway

Connie K. Ho | April 4, 2014



This is part of a series examining the 710 Corridor and its impact in the surrounding communities, produced in partnership with the California Endowment.

The air is filled with the smell of manure. The quiet "neighs" of horses can be heard, as they're groomed and fed. The lot is dusty and, overhead, power lines drape from one tower to the next. All of this is part of Rancho Rio Verde Riding Club (RRVRC), a hub for horse lovers offering classes and boarding, all tucked behind the walls of the 710 Freeway.

Robin Wall, a former second grade teacher turned business owner, bought RRVRC (located on 1000 W. Carson Street in Long Beach) in 1981. The property was only made up of stalls for individuals to board their horses.

"It was my project, it grew and we've been pretty successful as the businesses come and go. And we're lucky that we're in an area that is conducive to horse. There's not many places left like this," Wall says. "The ground was wonderful, I could see great things happening."

She remembers how there were no paved roads in the area at the time, only dirt paths and open land. Wall has grown the business to include an arena and a barn. To access the ranch now, people have to drive through a tunnel under the 710 Freeway and some aren't even aware of the property.

"It's very hard to find a place that will house a riding stable or riding club. We're unique here and they're not going to be building any million-dollar homes immediately around us. So, for now, we're fine," Wall says. "Hopefully, we never know, but hopefully we'll always have this little piece of wonderful land in the middle of a huge environment of city where we can maintain a horse world."

Wall believes that plans for the 710 Corridor Project, an expansion of the 710 Freeway that will address congestion and safety issues related to increased traffic volumes, will not impact her in a way that she needs to move the club. She currently leases the land from Southern California Edison, and her son David Wall has attended meetings on the project.



"I know we're going to have increased traffic and people and all of that, but hopefully we won't interfere too much with them and vice versa," Wall says. "We've lived through a lot of things out here. I think we're very fortunate because we were able to find land. By today's standards, there's no room any

more for stuff like this so we're very lucky and I think everyone here appreciates that."

RRVRC is a family-run business, with Wall's daughter Lisa Wall serving as the organization's head trainer. As a child, she would ride her horse to the beach, follow the L.A. River, and take it to the end of the 710 Freeway. She knew she had a love of horses at a young age and became a professional equestrian when she was 18.

"There's something really awesome about the horses and there's a love and a passion for me," Wall says. "If I can give a little bit of that for somebody else where they can enjoy it and have the same kind of love and passion for it, it's awesome."

RRVRC has also worked with a number of community organizations. One group, the Valley View Vaulters, is a vaulting program, known as "gymnastics on horses," for both handicap and non-handicap students. The Compton Jr. Posse Youth Equestrian Program, a leadership development program, is another program that utilizes the facility. The group works with students, many who are at-risk youth from single income and single parent households. Their mission is to "keep kids on horses and off the streets."

"I think that this agrarian lifestyle and the equestrian culture is something that needs to continue. International studies show that teaming horses with humans gives so much back, therapeutic ways in which people speaking impediments or gait impediment improve, people with emotional problems. Our kids, for example, suffer from post traumatic stress - it's a healing process with the horses," says Mayisha Akbar, who founded the organization 26 years ago.

Some of the trails used by the Compton Jr. Posse line the L.A. River.

"Riding on the L.A. River is a very interesting prospect depending on the time of day you go. If you go in the middle of the day, it's really kind of quiet and serene and it's a great ride," says Akbar.



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