

Riders place in endurance race

On Saturday, Feb. 28, five Verde Valley School riders finished in the top 10 in the 25-mile Valley of the Sun Endurance Race at McDowell Mountain Regional Park. Paula Senff, Lisa Poppe, Carolyn Nave, Maddie Smith and Caroline Diehl were among 39 riders in this endurance race that also included a 40- and 50-mile race. According to a press release, Senff finished in fifth place overall in the 25-mile race and was in second place for Best Condition Award. This award is given to the horse in the top 10 that the veterinarians determine is in the best physical condition and has been ridden most appropriately in the race. Out of a total of 800 points, the first place award earned 717 points, and Senff's horse got 714 points.

Maddie Smith, an eighth-grader in Big Park School and daughter of VVS College Counselor Kendall Smith and Director of Admission Don Smith, finished in sixth place. She was followed by Caroline Diehl, VVS's equestrian program director, in seventh place.

"We probably could have finished first, but we made two wrong turns on the trail and ended up riding close to another 10 extra miles — so our 25-mile race was more like a 35 miler. In 75 degrees [temperature], it was a challenge," stated Diehl.

Verde Valley School students

have been competing in endurance rides for more than 15 years. Kevin and Amy Warren decided to use the Arabians that had been donated to the school by Ann Brainerd of Sedona, since Arabians are meant for endurance racing. For the first several years VVS competed in the Flagstaff Cinder Hill Endurance Ride, then they raced in Wickenburg. "It is hard to find races that we can compete in because of our school schedule," stated Amy Warren, who added that over the years the students and VVS horses have consistently finished in the top 10, with the award of "Best Condition" won twice. "It's an excellent sport as winning is based on how well the horse is prepared and how in tune the rider is to their horse; however, breeding does play an important role," stated Warren. She and Kevin have helped every year since VVS started competing in these races.

To train for Saturday's race, Diehl, Kevin Warren and the students spent many weekends training, often leaving at 6 a.m. for five- or six-hour rides. They rode a 35-mile loop to Dead Horse State Park. "The students spent a lot of their weekend time training in addition to the two or three hours each weekday," stated Diehl, who added that VVS has great terrain all around for training for endurance races.



Courtesy photo

PAULA SENFF poses with the horse that earned 714 points out of 800 possible in the Best Condition Award category.