

Raleigh South CONNECTION

July 18-19, 2007

Ahead of her time



Elisabeth Rodriguez, shown here in full competition dress riding on Lieutenant, has accomplished much in a very short time.

Young girl rides toward bright future

By John Cate
Sports Editor

Perhaps no words sum up local author Elisabeth Rodriguez better than the nine she uses in her official bio.

There is no age to work with my mind...

On the surface alone, Rodriguez's story is impressive enough. Within a year of leaving her homeland to

build a new life in a country 5,000 miles away, she'd mastered the English language. Mastered it so well, in fact, that she went on to write a book described by one Internet reviewer as 'beautiful and inspiring,' and which is available for sale all around the world.

In the meantime, she worked closely with an internationally renowned show jumper, pursuing her dreams of someday taking part

in national and Olympic equestrian competitions. None of this hurt her schoolwork, either—she was, and is, a straight-A student.

But perhaps the most remarkable thing about this native of Buenos Aires, Argentina is that she achieved all of this by the age of 11.

Having recently celebrated her 12th birthday, Elisabeth and her family relocated to the Raleigh

FUTURE, 2A

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Purr-fect



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Local racing scene

Check out the Wake County Speedway standings Page 2B

Harry Potter mania

Harry Potter's latest movie is in theater's now Page 4A

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Pets

Rescue program finds homes for schnauzers

By Katie Watson
Staff Intern

"Bang, bang." Xena, a miniature schnauzer rolls over onto her side with a twitch in her back leg. She lies motionless for a few brief seconds and then springs up at the sight of her green and white striped cushioned frisbee.

Playing dead is one of the many tricks Xena has learned over the years from her owner Rhonda Lowe.

Lowe adopted Xena seven years ago, and since then has created a rescue program for miniature schnauzers in North Carolina. Founded in 2005 by Stephanie Bivens and Lowe, the North Carolina Schnauzer Rescue (NCSR) has been finding foster homes for Schnauzer since day one.

In the past two years, 140 dogs have been placed into foster homes and/or adopted through the program. "It's just as if they were my own



PHOTO BY KATIE WATSON
Rhonda Lowe holds Xena, a miniature schnauzer she adopted seven years ago.

dogs," Lowe said. Lowe exudes a sincere concern and care for the Schnauzers she rescues. She has also dedicated many hours to these canine companions.

"People don't realize the

RESCUE, PAGE 2A

Community

Proceeds from new home benefit sick boy

Builder looks to help family of child with rare genetic disorder

By Nancy Chang
Contributing Writer

Buying a house is a momentous occasion, and it's not often that purchasing a home can bring help and hope to those in need. But a beautiful home nearing completion in Cary will do just that for one local boy.

Nine-year-old Joshua Holdner of Holly Springs has a condition called Tyrosinemia Type 1, a rare genetic disorder that causes toxins to build up in various body tissues, which in turn results in damage to the liver, kidneys and central nervous system. Many children with the condition don't live to see the age of 10.

"Looking at Josh, you'd never even know he's sick, thanks to his medicine and his diet," said his mother, Teri Holdner. "But it's scary,



Those involved with "Joshua's House" gather on the front steps of the home. Pictured in the bottom row, from left, Kevin Swartz, Joshua Holdner, Teri Holdner, and Mike Holdner. Second row, Helen Swartz, Danielle Holdner, and Christine Osborne. On the top row is Michael Swartz.

and next year he'll be 10. We're just taking it a day at a time."

And for now, local builder Kevin Swartz is stepping up in a big way. He and his

business, the aptly named Heavenly Homes, have come to answer the Holdners' prayers. Kevin and his wife Helen first

HOME, PAGE 3A

■Children

Safety seat helps baby survive wreck

Parents urged to have seats installed by professionals

By Tamara Ward
Contributing Writer

It happened before he could react. In the early morning hours of July 8, Nick Brown, Holly Springs firefighter, Fuquay-Varina native, husband and new father was driving along Christian Light Road toward Fuquay-Varina with his 2-month-old daughter in the back seat, on his way to join his wife and mother-in-law. Before he could even touch his brake pedal, his car was hit.

A drunk driver ran the stop sign at Rawls Church Road and slammed into Brown's vehicle, pushing the car into a nearby field. Brown said his immediate thoughts were of his 2-month-

old daughter—he thought the impact killed her.

"All I could think of is my daughter being dead when we came to a screeching halt," Brown said, adding that he remembered pleading for her not to be dead.

The baby survived without a scratch, without a bruise. Brown said he remembers hearing four short cries as he was unbuckling himself—he turned to look at the baby, and she appeared as if someone just shaken her to wake her up from slumber.

Brown was transported to WakeMed in Cary, along with his daughter, and then moved to the Raleigh branch of the hospital. His injuries included a dislocated wrist, broken bones in his hands and dislocated fingers.

Despite his injuries, Brown said he was happy to hear the cries of his healthy, safe daughter, who was placed on his chest in the recovery room.

SAFETY, PAGE 2A



Niya and Nick Brown are grateful to the Fuquay-Varina firefighters who properly installed the car seat that saved the life of their daughter, 2-month-old Nico.

2A - RALEIGH SOUTH CONNECTION, July 18-19, 2007

Future: Talented author at age 11

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South area from south Florida for various reasons—her father for better job opportunities, Elisabeth to find a better place to keep a horse for her equestrian training. But for now, she's marketing her book, *Jumping Jack*, the story of one girl's dream...written by a young woman pursuing her own dream.

COMING TO AMERICA

Elisabeth was 6 years old when her parents decided that their daughter would have a better future somewhere other than Buenos Aires, a city of more than 12 million people, not all of whom are law-abiding citizens.

"Argentina is a beautiful place, but it's very unsafe," her mother, Sylvia Rodriguez, recalled. "You can't drive a car or even go to the bank without someone watching you. My husband and I decided we would come (to America) and find a better place for her to live and grow up."

"We really felt she would have more opportunities here."

In 2001, the Rodriguezes arrived in Miami, where they quickly found opportunity and blended into that city's large Hispanic community. A few years later, they moved to Orlando, where Elisabeth's dad, a tile and hardwood floorist, had plenty of work to do until recently, when the amount of new construction in the area began to taper off. In this line of work, you go where the real estate boom is, so last month, the family packed their bags once again and moved to North Carolina.

"There just wasn't any work (in Orlando) anymore," Sylvia recalls. "All the land there has been developed, and without new development, there's no work."

The family enjoys their new surroundings, away from the oft-overcrowded tourist mecca. A bonus for Elisabeth is that in North Carolina, she'll have the opportunity to live in a home with lots of land to care for a horse—something that was impossible in Orlando.

"It's better here than in Florida," Elisabeth said. "People are nicer here."

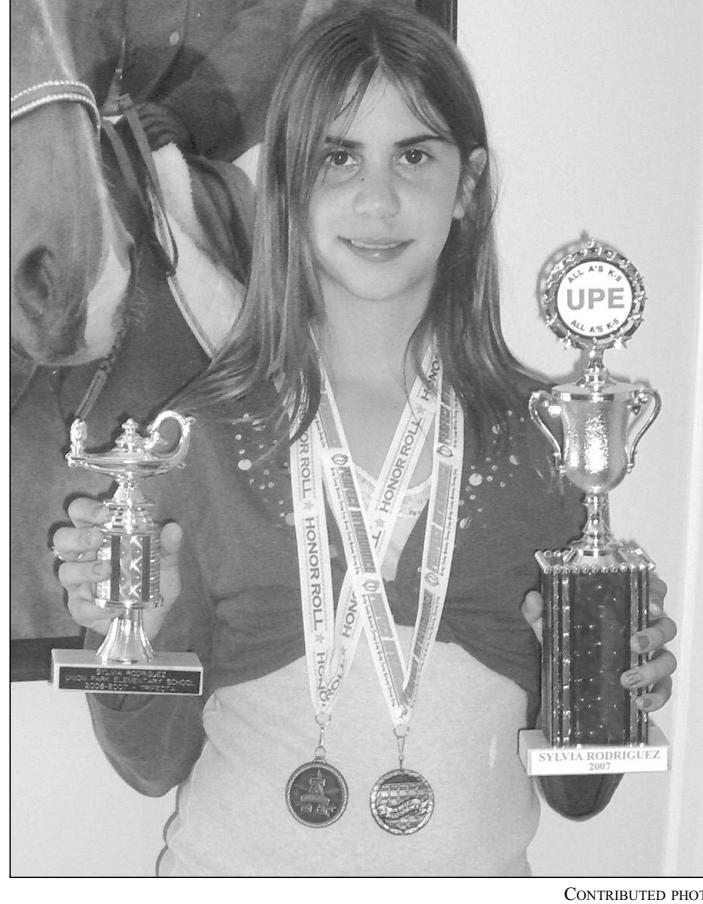
A NEW WAY OF LIFE

Moving almost halfway across the globe would be traumatic for some children, but Elisabeth took to her new surroundings with ease. She spent her first-grade year in Miami in an English as a Second Language (ESL) class, but within a year had mastered the new language, passing all five ESL levels by year's end.

Today, she is not only a straight-A student, she can read adult-level text in two different languages.

"You can get a good education here if you work hard," said Sylvia.

Elisabeth quickly made her way onto the honor roll and



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Local author and equestrian rider Elisabeth Rodriguez shows off two of her show-jumping trophies.

into academically gifted classes, where she quickly displayed a talent for writing.

"When I was in second grade, the teacher in my gifted class would give us 10 words and tell us to write a story with them," she said. "I would write a story, then take some paperboard, make a cover, and do the story like a book."

Elisabeth's creativity wasn't lost on her teacher.

"(The teacher) said that she would probably be a writer someday," Sylvia said.

Little did anyone know how soon that prediction would come true.

THE INSPIRATION

In Orlando, Elisabeth's love of horses took full bloom, and she took up horseback riding, and then progressed to show jumping. She was fortunate enough to work with Julio Ledesma, a noted Brazilian trainer whose charges have won two Olympic medals. Ledesma gave Elisabeth an older show horse to train with, and she soon began to dream of one day competing in the national show jumping championships and the Olympic Games.

"He's a 10-year-old competition horse," Elisabeth said. "He's a good jumper, and very sweet, but..."

There was another horse on the farm that caught Elisabeth's eye, and with good reason, it turned out. Lieutenant, the horse featured on the front cover of *Jumping Jack*, was a compatriot of sorts, having been born in Argentina.

"Lieutenant is the horse for me," she said. "I wish I could buy him, but I can't afford him. I'm always afraid he'll be sold to someone else."

Elisabeth and Lieutenant became fast friends, with their common homeland no doubt playing a role.

"I think he recognizes our accent," said Sylvia.

The asking price for Elisabeth's dream horse is

\$18,000, and she began looking for ways to raise the money. The answer was not long in coming to her.

"I decided that I needed a job... (but) since I am not of age, my parents said I couldn't work anywhere," she recalled.

It was then that Elisabeth had her revelation. She may not be old enough to have a job, but no one is too young to use their imagination and writing talents.

"I thought of the idea of writing a book right away," Elisabeth said. "I could put my two favorite things, writing and horses, together and write a book."

THE BOOK

Between her riding and schoolwork, Elisabeth wrote *Jumping Jack* over the course of a year. The book tells the story of 13-year-old Sarah Baker, an equestrian rider with dreams of one day competing in the U.S. Equestrian Nationals. Elisabeth couldn't have known it at the time, but the plot she developed would in many ways mirror her own future.

Baker lives in North Carolina, where she lived on a farm with her beloved horse, Jack (the "Jumping Jack" of the title), and a dog named Ginger. However, fate forced her father to seek work in another state, and the family ended up living in a town in Tennessee.

Life gets better for Sarah once she discovers an equestrian barn belonging to Mike Smith, a retired Olympic show jumper. She begins to sneak into the complex and secretly ride a white mare, Starlight's Hope. Smith soon discovers what Sarah is doing, but instead of being angry, takes her under his wing and helps her achieve her dream of reaching the Nationals.

With a barn available, Sarah is now able to be reunited with Jack, but has to ride Starlight's Hope in the state championships after Jack suffers an injury. Undaunted, she finishes

first, qualifying for the Nationals. There, a few days before the most important competition of her life, the mare became ill, forcing Sarah and Mike to call on Jack at the last minute. Together, they seize the moment and Sarah wins the national championship.

The story then segues ahead 18 months, where the lives of some of the protagonists have taken an interesting twist...

GETTING PUBLISHED

With the book completed, Elisabeth and her parents had to figure out how to share her work with the world. Sylvia began with the traditional routes.

"I took her information to several publishers," she recalls. "(When) I told them that she was 11 years old and had just written a 136-page book, they were all like 'send it right away!'"

But there was a problem. Some of the publishing houses were interested in bringing *Jumping Jack* to press, but they wanted Elisabeth and her family to sign all their rights to the book away. After discussing what they would do, the family decided they would work with Author House, a self-publishing company, to get the book printed, and then market it themselves.

"She didn't want to lose her rights to the story," Sylvia said. "We eventually decided we would self-publish. It's a little bit harder to sell the book that way, but you can order it."

So far, the decision is paying off. *Jumping Jack* has been listed for sale on several Internet book-selling sites around the world since last fall. These sites often contain several million books and other media for sale, but Elisabeth's book has slowly been getting noticed.

"In the first three months the book was out, its rating on Barnesandnoble.com went from about one million, to 600,000 and then to 160,000," Sylvia said. "This means more people were finding and buying it."

WHAT'S NEXT?

Elisabeth says she will probably be attending Clayton Middle School in the fall, and while she hasn't ruled out writing another book in the future, she has other long-term goals she wants to pursue first.

"Right now, I want to focus on my training," she said. "I've been riding for about two years, but only about once a week."

In addition to competing in the Olympics, Elisabeth also hopes to attend Harvard someday and to start a rescue center for horses who would otherwise be sent to slaughterhouses.

To learn more about Elisabeth's book or to contact her, visit the book's official website at <http://www.myjumping-jack.com>. The book is available for sale through Author House (www.authorhouse.com) and also via Amazon and Barnes and Noble's websites.

Safety: Family thankful to F-V firefighters

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"With her voice lighting up the ER, it just put tears in my eyes," he said. "I knew she was okay."

Brown said he wanted to give special thanks to the Fuquay-Varina Fire Department for installing his child's car seat. Just before his daughter was born, he took the car seat to the fire station so certified employees could install it.

"If it weren't for them, I don't think I'd have a young one to this day," he said. "Their job was well done, and it saved my baby's life."

Brown, a Holly Springs firefighter for nearly seven years, said he discussed having his baby seat professionally installed with two Fuquay-Varina firefighters who work with him on his shift.

"I always said, whenever I have a baby, I'm coming to you all," he said. "They've always said, 'Please come'."

Brown urged other parents with children in car seats to do the same.

"Have a second opinion by your local fire department, your local police department, that does car seat safety," he said. "It's better safe than sorry."

In addition to the Fuquay-Varina Fire Department, other local agencies with employees certified to install car seats include the Apex Fire Department, Garner Police Department and Holly Springs Police Department. Call the non-emergency number of the department before going; some agencies have special

times during the week for installations.

Brown said he also wanted to express gratitude to the Harnett County Fire Department employees who responded to the accident. He thanked his coworkers at the Holly Springs Fire Department and his friends at the Fuquay-Varina Fire Department for phone calls, visits, thoughts and prayers.

"I'm on my way to a good recovery, and I'm doing well," he said.

He said he has a doctor's visit this week and hopes to return to work soon, adding that not being able to help his wife care for their newborn baby has been difficult.

"It's keeping me from having my daddy time with my young one," he said. "I can't hold her as much as possible. ... My wife has a heavy task right now taking care of me and (our baby)."

Brown said he did not harbor hard feelings for the drunk driver.

"I just pray to God that she comes home and she's okay," he said, "but it's just not right for someone to drink and drive and to put not only me but her (my daughter's) life in jeopardy."

Brown's mother-in-law, Dr. Melanie Stewart, said she also wanted to thank Fuquay-Varina firefighters for installing the car seat, and the Northern Harnett Fire Department who responded to the accident.

"We attribute her (the baby's) safety to God first and to the wisdom and knowledge of the Fuquay firefighters," she said.

Rescue: Program aids homeless dogs

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

amount of volunteering...it is a fulltime effort from all," Lowe said.

Although the NCSR consumes a large chunk of Lowe's life she has always worked fulltime. Her career as a professional photographer ended, yet was replaced.

"I enjoyed (photography) for a while, but I enjoy the dogs more," Lowe said.

Lowe is now a project manager at CISCO. Bivens also has a fulltime commitment as a schoolteacher at Penny Road Elementary.

Instead of housing the Schnauzer in a shelter, the NCSR uses a network of approximately fifteen foster homes in the triangle area to care for the dogs. Lowe finds foster care for the Schnauzers, but does not house any of them.

Space is always limited in the foster program because of the lack of homes. "We are always looking for new members," Lowe said.

The NCSR is looking to expand in the long run. Lowe is hoping that in the

future she will be able to have a center devoted solely to the rescue program. The center would be used as a "half-way" point and could possibly offer obedience/training classes and a grooming station.

"Foster care is a win-win situation," Lowe said. "While (the dogs) are in foster care, we pay for everything. Foster families really only pay for food."

Becoming a foster family is a simple process, with few, yet important requirements. A foster family/individual must be 21 years of age and be a North Carolina resident. A home evaluation and membership application must also be completed, along with means to transport the dog. Having a patient attitude is also a desired trait, seeing that Schnauzers tend to be strong-willed.

Although, volunteer work has no monetary value, it certainly fills a different void for Lowe. "While my fulltime job pays the bills," Lowe said, "volunteering gives me a chance to give back."

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