Energy-saving systems will allow Horses Help to cut costs

by **Philip Haldiman** - Dec. 24, 2009 08:16 AM
The Arizona Republic

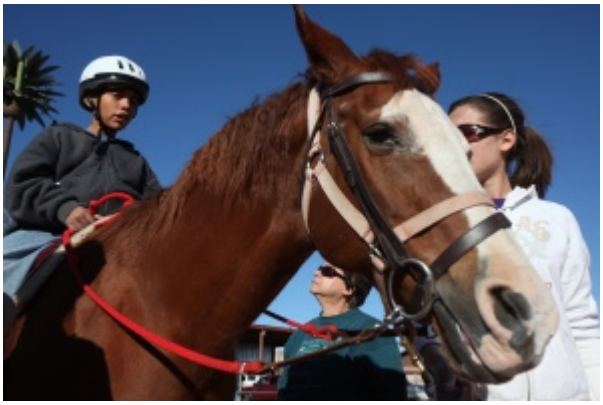
A water cistern and a large-scale composting system aren't exactly the most orthodox of Christmas presents.

But the non-profit group Horses Help is getting what it asked for this holiday season - a sustainable gift package.

The organization, which provides equine therapy for those with special needs, has been implementing a number of green aspects to its facility in north Phoenix. It has done it thanks to donations from a number of organizations, including Aide Solar, Photovoltaic Testing Laboratory, Ironco, and Geothermal Cooling & Heating.

A water cistern was installed in November, and the solar project is to be completed early next year. By the new year, the urban farm model will be nearly complete, cutting costs drastically, said Gregg Goodman, executive director for Horses Help Therapeutic Riding Center.

"This project was designed to provide a variety of components to help with organization sustainability and provide educational opportunities to a variety of groups, organizations and individuals in our community," Goodman said. "We're looking to create a model that other companies and community members can follow."



Pat Shannahan/The Arizona Republic
Bryan Fernandez rides a horse at Horses Help in Phoenix. Over the last year and a half, the organization has been implementing a number green aspects to their facility in north Phoenix, including solar, geothermal and composting components.

With the installation of solar modules and a geothermal cooling and heating system, Horses Help could cut up to 80 percent of its anticipated electricity cost.

The money saved from these new installations will benefit the special-needs population the organization services, Goodman said.

"Any dollar we can save helps," he said. "Some of the people we work with are kids who have troubles at home. They come out here, and by working with the horses, they get behavioral feedback from the horses."

Tom Carter III, project manager of Horses Help's sustainability project, said non-profit groups and people in low income brackets could benefit most from green installations.

Because non-profits are usually entrenched in the community, making them energy efficient ensures they will be able to perform their mission more effectively, allowing the community to continually benefit from their existence, he said.

"By definition, non-profits have specific missions to accomplish," Carter said. "A 5-kilowatt - or better yet, a 10-kilowatt –solar system installed at a Boys and Girl Club or a halfway house may indirectly affect hundreds of people."

The move toward Horses Help's green model was born as a way to control costs associated with its manure disposal. Goodman said the large-scale composting area has virtually eliminated waste removal costs, helped with building sustainable gardens and provided a place where other community gardens can find properly prepared compost.

"That's how it all started, with poop," Goodman said.

Non-profit Arizona Homegrown Solutions obtained a grant for the installation of the water cistern and is now working on a sensory garden for the farm. The partnership between the two will provide classes at the farm, teaching others the interworking relationships of conservation and sustainability and how to implement their own green components as they are installed on the farm.

Jennifer Wadsworth, co-founder of Arizona Homegrown Solutions, said her organization will host classes that involve a hands-on component, such as gardening, composting, urban orchards and water harvesting.

"Sustainable solutions should be implemented more widely and dispersed in all areas of the Valley at locations where the public could come and interact with and learn from them," Wadsworth said.

"It's a win for the clients of Horses Help and the public at large, as they get to see a variety of sustainable solutions all in one location working together."