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## 4-H Horse Program ambassador creates Little Bits Miniature Club to promote miniature horses

- Carolyn R. Wilson | For the Washington County News 2/12/2020

GLADE SPRING, Va. — Fifteen-year-old Audrey Allen knows firsthand that some of the best things come in small packages.

Such as the small but mighty miniature horse.

When Audrey, an ambassador for the Virginia 4-H Horse Program, needed a yearlong project for the state program, the equestrian teen turned her interests to promoting miniature horses in the county.

Audrey has created the Little Bits Miniature Club, an opportunity for youth to increase their knowledge of miniature horses and to spread the word about the Virginia 4-H Horse Program. While miniatures are not suitable for riding unless the child is 70 pounds or less, their outstanding disposition makes them a natural for the show ring.

“The good thing is you don’t have to own a miniature horse to join,” she said.

The club will meet from 6 to 7 p.m. on the third Monday of each month from February through May at the Washington County Extension Office in Abingdon. The first meeting is Monday, Feb. 17.

The club is open to youth ages 5 to 18 who are current 4-H members or interested in learning more about the 4-H program.

Audrey also has invited 4-H members in Smyth County to participate in the new club.

Audrey was selected as an ambassador for the program based on her accomplishments in 4-H, as well as in the community. She is an accomplished equestrian, having placed first in many hunter classes in local and state shows.

The youth is among only 12 ambassadors selected from throughout the state.

“Being part of the horse program pushes you out of your comfort zone and helps you to interact with people from other areas,” said the teen, who is also president of the Washington County 4-H Saddle Club.

## **What is a miniature horse?**

While most of the barn stalls on the Allens’ Glade Spring farm hold full-size horses, two of them are homes for miniature horses. Apache, a chocolate-colored horse with a blond mane and tail, is being trained to pull a cart, and Puddin’, a bay mare with a star on her forehead, is shown locally and within the state by Audrey’s younger brother, Will.

“Not a lot of people know about miniature horses, but they are very manageable, easy for children to handle and easy keepers,” said Audrey.

“Miniature horses are great for kids just getting started with horsemanship,” she said.

“They are 38 inches or smaller and usually weigh between 150 and 350 pounds. They actually are horses, not ponies.”

“The minis require similar care to full-sized horses, and they take up less space, which makes them accessible to more people — even those who have little experience with horses,” said the teen.

“Plus, they’re not as big and scary as larger horses.”

## **Making a big impact in the community**

Ever since horses galloped into Audrey’s heart as a child, the teen has enjoyed sharing her equestrian skills with other youth.

“I hope to increase the participation of miniature horses at district shows and to let kids know there are other ways to be involved with horses instead of riding,” she said.

During the first meeting, the teen will introduce the characteristics and basic care of the miniature horse.

“There are many interesting facts about miniature horses,” said Audrey.

“Miniature horses can live to be 25-35 years of age, which is longer than average horses. They also can be used as both therapy and service animals.”

According to her, miniature horses come in every possible color. “Some colors that are rare in other breeds are common in minis.”

Audrey will address the show classes available for miniature horses.

In showmanship classes, the miniature horses are shown in halters and judged on confirmation and presentation, she said.

Miniature hunter class involves leading the miniature horses over small jumps, such as fences.

“Will’s favorite thing to do with Puddin’ is mini hunters,” said the older sister. “The biggest reward for him has been seeing her go from just being a pet to being a competitive mini at 4-H shows. Will had very little interest in horses until Puddin’ came to our farm. Now he enjoys the responsibility of having his own miniature horse to take care of.”

Minatures also compete in trail obstacles where they maneuver around bridges, cones and gates. The miniature horses also compete by pulling carts.

## Hands-on experience

Audrey is planning to hold a miniature horse clinic this summer, allowing club members to get hands-on experience with the miniature horses before competing in local shows.

In addition to using the family’s two miniature horses, she wants to foster two more minis from Horse Helpers of the High Country west of Boone, North Carolina, a rescue organization that offers aid to horses, donkeys and mules.

Although her project with the Virginia 4-H Horse Program concludes this fall, Audrey plans to continue her work with Little Bits Miniature Club.

To learn more about Little Bits Miniature Club, contact Audrey Allen at [audreya276@gmail.com](mailto:audreya276@gmail.com).

### SIDEBAR BOX

*If You Go*

**What:** Little Bits Miniature Club

**When:** 6 to 7 p.m. on the third Monday of each month from February through May

Next meeting is Monday, Feb. 17

**Where:** Washington County Extension Office, 234 Valley Street NW, Abingdon



Audrey Allen, 15, trains miniature horse Apache for the show ring. Audrey is an ambassador for the 4-H Horse Program and will be hosting classes to spread awareness for the joys of working with miniature horses.

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Audrey's younger brother, Will, works with Puddin', another miniature horse on their family farm.

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Miniature horses can show in miniature hunter classes, which involve leading the horses over small jumps, as well as trail obstacles and pulling cart competition.

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