

# Area woman trains mustang for competition

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Solar Flare takes a walk around her pen with owner Leslie Cieplechowicz-Hofen on Sunday at the Shimmering Moon Farm in Emmett. Cieplechowicz-Hofen is training Solie for the Extreme Mustang Makeover. / Andrew Jowett/Times Herald

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Leslie Cieplechowicz-Hofen takes her horse Solar Flare out of her stable Sunday at the Shimmering Moon Farm in Emmett. She said she has always wanted to take a mustang and train it for competition. / Andrew Jowett/Times Herald

EMMETT TWP. -- Leslie

Cieplechowicz-Hofen's love affair with horses has taken a wild turn.

The Emmett Township woman and her family have taken on a three-month challenge to train a Nevada mustang.

The 3-year-old mare came home to Shimmering Moon Farm at 12516 Foley Road in Emmett on Jan. 27. Cieplechowicz-Hofen has until April 20 to teach Solar Flare, nicknamed Solie, to accept a saddle and rider and to respond to commands.

Just weeks out of running wild on the sparse plains of Nevada, Solie has adjusted well to sleeping indoors on a farm with about 20 other horses, Cieplechowicz-Hofen said.

Solie has even made a new friend: Her stallmate Hidalgo is a 5-year-old Spanish mustang that Cieplechowicz-Hofen describes as easy-going and mellow.

In April, Cieplechowicz-Hofen and Solie will travel to Madison, Wis., to compete in the Extreme Mustang Makeover at the Midwest Horse Fair. The event is made possible by the federal Bureau of Land Management.

Horses and riders will be tested on their ability to complete an obstacle course and on the horses' health. The top 10 finalists will go on to compete in a freestyle session.

After the competition, the mustangs will be sold at auction. Cieplechowicz-Hofen said her family already has decided it will bid on Solie.

Cieplechowicz-Hofen's two eldest children, Zachary, 20, and Hannah, 18, have been helping her work with Solie -- and Zachary will be riding her during the competition.

Growing up in Michigan, Cieplechowicz-Hofen said she was a horse-crazy teenager showing in hunter circuits. Now the coach for the Memphis junior and senior high school equestrian teams, Cieplechowicz-Hofen said it was finally time to bring a mustang home.

"I always wanted to -- since I've been a teenager -- own a Bureau of Land Management mustang and train it," Cieplechowicz-Hofen said.

Cieplechowicz-Hofen said she works with Solie about 30 minutes, twice a day on ground skills. The next step is for the mustang to accept a saddle, adding weight slowly and eventually introducing a rider, which she hopes to do by the end of March.

Solie is willing to learn, but cautious, Cieplechowicz-Hofen said.

"With mustangs, they identify people more readily than domesticated horses," she said. "They're more cautious about new people."

Training progress depends on the personality of the horse, Cieplechowicz-Hofen said, but Solie is right on track.

"They're just like people. Some are a little laid back. Some are a little more flighty," she said.

By April, Cieplechowicz-Hofen said she would like to have Solie jumping a course of fences.

Shimmering Moon Farm is no stranger to working with young horses -- it breeds Arabian sport horses and trains them to jump fences and compete in endurance challenges. Cieplechowicz-Hofen said she has competed in previous training challenges with rescued Arabians and Appaloosas.

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