

# Future Stockmen Turquoise Trail

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**The Turquoise Trail Wranglers 4-H Club fills a void for horse-crazy kids in Santa Fe, New Mexico.**

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY **KYLE PARTAIN**

Opposite page: Shania Borrego takes her turn roping a steer. The 11-year-old competes in 4-H rodeos and the New Mexico Junior Rodeo Association.

**C**RISTINA IANNUCCI AND HER DAD, Rick, weren't looking to save kids from the streets when they started the Turquoise Trail Wranglers 4-H Club in 2007. After all, the "mean streets" of Santa Fe, New Mexico, are filled with art galleries and upscale restaurants. But there was still a need—a need for horse-crazy kids to learn about all the things they could and couldn't do with their horses.

Two years later, more than a dozen club members and their parents regularly attend sessions at an arena the Iannuccis built on their land just southeast of Santa Fe—on Highway 14, better known as the Turquoise Trail. Monthly meetings often provide members with the chance to get horseback and learn new skills, such as reining, roping or working cattle. But group leaders have taken it a step farther in providing members with a well-rounded look at the Old West and all that it encompassed.

Lessons in chuckwagon cooking, horse photography and Western art have also been part of the Wranglers' agenda.

"I think a lot of our members have had their eyes opened to a whole new world," says Cristina. "Some of them were strictly trail riders, but now they are getting the chance to learn about other aspects of horses and the West." >>>





Top: Cristina Iannucci sizes up cattle during her turn at a recent meeting of the Turquoise Trail Wranglers 4-H Club. Above: Diane Clare instructs David Marmon II in the finer points of working cattle in the arena.

#### RETIRED FROM FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT,

Rick Iannucci knows the best way to keep kids out of trouble is to keep them busy. Along with Nancy De Santis, he works to pull together Santa Fe's considerable resources on the Western lifestyle for the Wranglers' benefit. Local chuckwagon cook Carl Hawkins has provided demonstrations and cooking lessons mixed with Old West history and folklore. Bonanza Creek Ranch Manager Steve Price and area rancher Henry McKinley have chipped in to teach roping and ranching skills. Photographer Tony Bonanno provided photography lessons for members and their parents.

Members ranging in age up to 18 have taken it all in. They show up for each meeting, whether it involves getting horseback in the arena or not. But there's little doubt the brand-new arena, and the chance to ride and rope in it, is the main drawing point.

"I'm always looking for chances to ride and learn new things," says 17-year-old N'DJamena (pronounced Ja-Mena) Marmon. "I think I want to be a barrel racer someday, but roping interests me,

too. What's not to like about having this great arena to come ride in? We don't have an arena at home, so I'm going to be here every time they unlock the gate."N'DJamina's three younger brothers are also club members. David, 16, is training his stallion to be a rope horse.

"Everybody can learn something here," he says. "I'm here to learn whatever they want to teach that day. We hadn't been involved with 4-H before, but this group is a great fit for our family. We all love being around horses and learning more about them."

Even area kids who've grown up in and around rodeo seem to enjoy the Wranglers' camaraderie. Shania Borrego, 11,

has watched her father and other family members compete in rodeo all her life. She's active in 4-H rodeos and the New Mexico Junior Rodeo Association, where she runs barrels and poles, ties goats and breakaway ropes.

"We have an arena at home, so I get to practice a lot," she says. "But it's still fun to come out here and be around the other kids. I really like rodeo, and I'm learning more about it by being here."

Cade Hermeling, 12, has been around horses all his life, as well. But he just took up roping in the last couple of years. Along with Shania, he's one of several club members who regularly compete in the state's junior rodeos. His involvement



Brandon Clare, left, and Danielle Mueller warm up their horses in the Turquoise Trail Wranglers arena just outside Santa Fe, New Mexico.



**New Mexico Junior Rodeo Association contestant and Turquoise Trail Wranglers 4-H Club member Cade Hermeling gets in some roping practice at the club's arena.**

with 4-H didn't begin until after the Turquoise Trail Wranglers were formed.

"This is a really great group," Cade says. "Everything we do involves horses, and I like that. And now we have another arena where I can practice. That's good because I like to practice as much as I can."

**THERE ARE MORE THAN 76,000** 4-H members in New Mexico alone. Countless local clubs are available, yet the Iannuccis couldn't find one in their area where Cristina completely fit. That's why she joined with a friend to start her own club. That friend moved away shortly thereafter, but the foundation of the Turquoise Trail Wranglers was solidly in place.

"There really wasn't anything like what we wanted to do in Santa Fe County at the time," Cristina says. "One thing led to another and the next thing we knew kids were signing up left and right. It was kind of like running in quicksand. Once we got it started, there was no turning back."

Naturally outgoing and positive to a fault, Rick and Cristina's infectious personalities probably had as much to do with the group's success as anything. But again, they point to the central theme of the horse as the main factor in the Wranglers' growth.

"When you first join 4-H, they give you this big packet with all the things you can do," Cristina says. "It ranges from shooting guns to working with small, pocket animals such as hamsters. That's the huge variety of stuff that's available.

And a lot of the groups are just 4-H in general, so they try to do a little bit of everything.

"There are so many people in our area who have horses and live the Western lifestyle. Those are the people we wanted to serve with the Turquoise Trail Wranglers. Some of that other stuff in 4-H is great, but there were plenty of groups where you could already get involved with those things. We needed a group where horses were the main thing to do. It was important to me to have a place to meet other kids who are into the same stuff I am."

Cristina falls in the middle of club members age-wise, but says the vast age difference in the group is one of the best things about the Wranglers.

"We have a lot of little kids in our group, but it's fun to help them accomplish something and see the joy on their faces," she says. "There's also a level playing field when we get horseback in the arena. I can't just assume I know more than the kid who is half my age."

"I have a lot of respect for how good some of the younger kids are with their horses. I've learned that the younger kids can still teach the older ones a thing or two once we get horseback." 🐾

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*Kyle Partain is a Western Horseman associate editor. To learn more about the Turquoise Trail Wranglers, visit [turquoisetrailwranglers4hclub.blogspot.com](http://turquoisetrailwranglers4hclub.blogspot.com). Send comments on this story to [edit@westernhorseman.com](mailto:edit@westernhorseman.com).*