

Introducing ... Jann O'Leary Costa

■ **Name:** Jann O'Leary Costa.

■ **Age:** 55.

■ **Address:** Earl Township

■ **Occupation and place of employment:** Animal therapist employed by JC Cutting Horses, Earl Township.

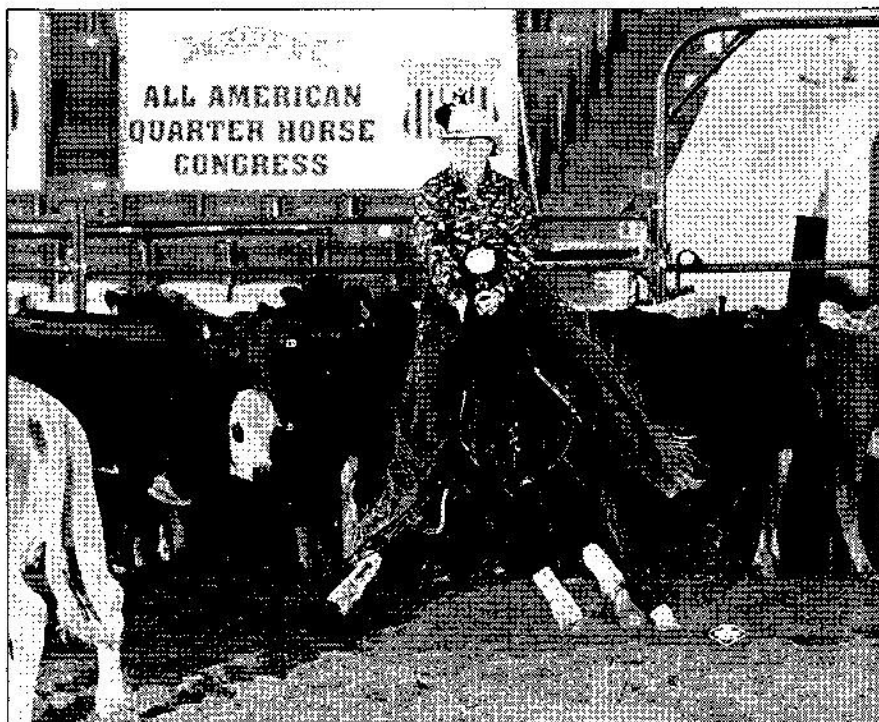
■ **When and why I began to exercise:**

I had tried almost every sport known to man: skiing, running, tennis, basketball, racquetball, handball, swimming, diving. But nothing really grabbed me. I wasn't passionate about any of these, but I always had a fascination with horses. I grew up in the city in Rhode Island and really had not been exposed to horses, so I wasn't even aware of the many different kinds of riding and equestrian sports that were available. I was teaching at a college that had an equine program, and employees could take riding for free. I enrolled and in a very short while I was hooked and had no idea that this would change my entire life.

■ **Type of exercise:** The nice thing about horses is that almost everything you do with them is a form of exercise, from lifting hay bales and grain, bending and stretching to groom and the actual riding itself. Recently, I have been competing in a competition called Versatility, which is negotiating on horseback, through an obstacle course. I had to be ready for whatever the course designers threw at me. Riding uses muscles that we don't normally use in any other sport, so to add a degree of difficulty to normal riding calls on us to stretch our physical limits. I also show cutting horses, which requires an enormous sense of balance and a dedication to practice.

■ **Hardest hurdle to overcome:** I think for most riders, the hardest hurdle to overcome is the dedication and determination to succeed. Riding may look easy, but it takes hours of work and it really takes the rider outside their comfort zone. There is always some degree of fear and a lack of confidence that causes some riders to give up. For me, there was never a question that I would keep trying. Once I got started, I wanted to do this so much, that nothing could stop me. I pushed myself to ride when I was tired, afraid and sore, but I was determined to be good at something. For me that something was riding.

■ **Biggest exercise achievement:** In riding, achievements are easy to iden-



Courtesy of Jann O'Leary Costa

Jann O'Leary Costa of Earl Township rides her horse in a competition.

tify because there are real measurable goals. One of the nicest things about riding is that it does not limit people because of their age. However, that means you often compete against much younger riders. So anytime you reach a real goal, it is a true accomplishment. In 2005, I was listed in the Top 100 in the World in the \$20,000 Non-Pro division of the National Cutting Horse Association. I was very proud of that. Recently, I was selected to compete in a national competition in Springfield, Mass., at Equine Affaire.

After submitting a video of me and my horse working obstacles, we were accepted to compete against 30 other riders in the Versatile Horse and Rider Competition. Although my horse has never competed in this sport and was just overcoming a serious muscle injury, we were named to the Top 10. I was on of the oldest riders in the competition and was thrilled with our finish.

■ **How exercise helps me:** Riding helps me on several different levels. Obviously, the benefit of just being involved in a very physical activity is one reward in itself. But because rid-

ing is not an indoor sport, it makes me get out of the house, away from the computer, into the fresh air and sunshine (most of the year). As I said before, riding allows me to meet and exceed very measurable goals. So riding can be very good for self-confidence and ego. But riding has benefits that some other sports do not. The whole aspect of building a relationship with a horse has an almost spiritual benefit that most riders value.

■ **Tips to others:** If you think you might want to get involved with horses, visit a facility near you. You might want to visit more than one to determine what style of riding suits you. Don't run out, buy a horse and put it in your backyard. There is a lot to learn, and you can spend a whole lot of money needlessly, if you get bad advice.

— Compiled by Courtney Diener-Stokes

■ Once a week Lifestyle will profile a person who has made exercise a part of his or her life. If you know someone who enjoys being physically active, write to Fitness profile, Reading Eagle Company, P.O. Box 582, Reading, PA 19603, or e-mail lifestyle@readingeagle.com. Include the person's name, address and telephone number and why you think he or she should be profiled.