

# BUTLER CREEK HORSE FARM

Story by Rachel Robertson | Photography by Rachel Robertson



## ALTHOUGH

Diane James just purchased her business in June, she is no novice. A lifetime of learning about horses and business led her to first manage, and now own Butler Creek Horse Farm in Sedro-Woolley.

"Throughout my life, I've just about always had horses, but I've always wanted a place of my own where I could train horses and teach people how to ride—kids especially," James said. "So, this farm has fulfilled what I've wanted to do for a long time."

When James was five years old she loved spending time at the horse farms near her home in Holden, Mass. Rather than fighting James' passion, her mother decided that for safety reasons she had better sign her up for riding lessons.

James soon showed signs of being an excellent trainer. At 17 she purchased a Morgan horse of great breeding that was slated to be killed; the owners had determined he would not make a good show horse because he paced. Learning dressage from a book, James trained him for four years before she sold him to her sister. No one would ever guess he was not a fit show horse: "She won all blue ribbons [with him] in the Command Class all the time," James said.

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### WHO

Diane James'  
Butler Creek Horse Farm

### WHAT

Training horses and teaching people how to ride

### MOTIVATION

A passion for horses

## Horse farm

*fulfills a  
life-long  
dream*

James started working professionally with horses eight years ago, employed by several stables near Eugene, Ore. doing "whatever they needed me to do," she said. Working on a variety of farms gave her an opportunity to observe a lot of different training and instructional techniques as well as barn management methods. The experience paid off and she landed a job managing a horse farm in Ferndale, where she stayed for two years.

James' foray into business started early as well, working in her father's jewelry store as a teenager. Her first business venture was a successful CPA practice that she and her former husband started together, which she helped run for eight years.

Combined with her love of horses and good business sense, James's experience as an educator makes her ultimately suited for running a horse farm. Although her college degree is in psychology, she spent the first three years pursuing a kindergarten and primary education certificate, and taught in her church primary program for 20 years.

When James was managing Butler Creek Horse Farm for previous owner Cathy Sherris, the business ran into some trouble when the new trainers they hired left and took their clients with them. Since

then, James has worked to build up her client base and found great success in horse riding camps for kids. In her first summer as the owner, James expanded the number of camps to six one-week sessions, up from just two last year. Many of the children that attended the camps are now coming back for lessons.

James feels her success will come from operating a clean, efficient, and friendly farm where the horses are healthy and happy. Assisting her is a small but dedicated staff that includes her 16-year-old son, Justin, and her husband, Michael James (when he isn't busy running his own business, Design Northwest). Completing the close-knit group is Susan Burkland (who also boards her horses at Butler Creek), Burkland's daughter Charlotte, and Charlotte's friend, Samantha Poteet.

James recommends that anyone starting a new business should have financial backing. "If you are starting a business brand new it takes about three years before you break even," she said.

"You need to be very, very frugal—you need to watch every penny and not spend more than you absolutely have to," she continued, emphasizing that it pays to shop around and find quality goods at a reasonable price.



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