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## BURNING QUESTIONS

from our readers

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## HEARTBEATS:

Honoring the Code  
of the Cowboy

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for the trail

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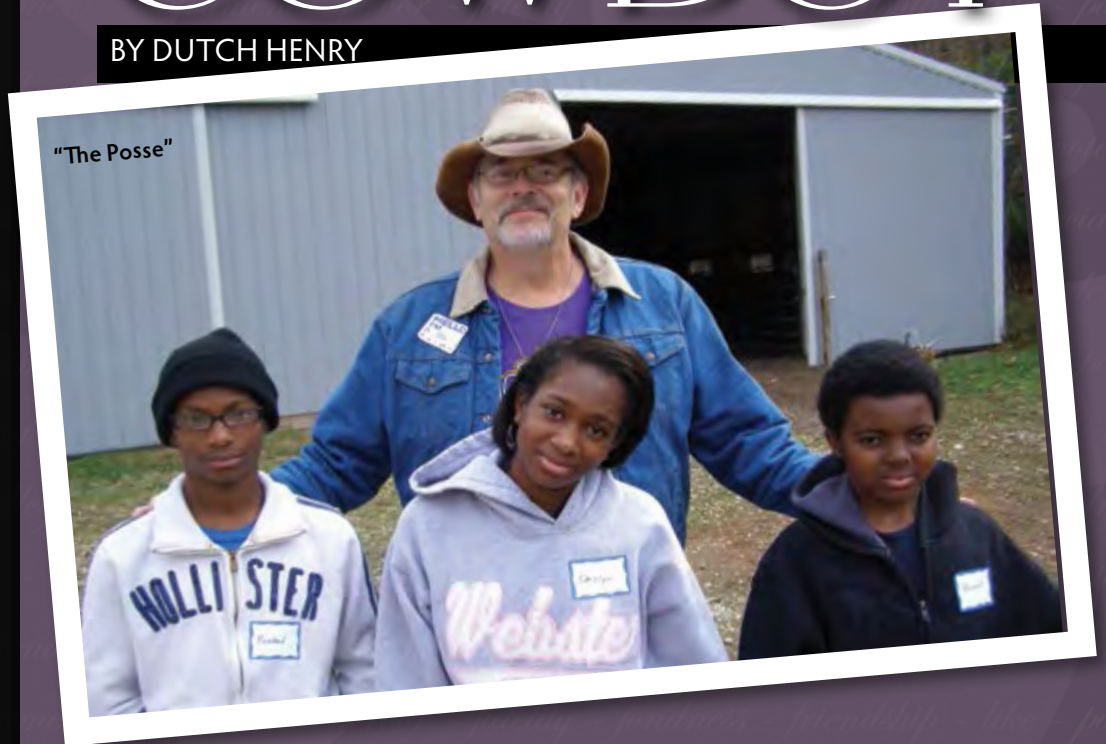
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INNER CITY SLICKERS AND MICHAEL MCMEEL  
OFFER KIDS A LEG UP ON LIFE

## HONORING THE CODE OF THE COWBOY

BY DUTCH HENRY



In today's fast paced and often troubled world, it's easy for children to lose, or not even discover, their self esteem, capacity for trust or even their ability to love. Children today too often grow up in neighborhoods swimming in guns, drugs and violence. In our modern throwaway society, where can they turn to seek role models and direction in life? Who hears them when they turn to self-destruction and violence in their quest to be noticed?

One man who noticed them tugging on his heart back during the riots of the early '90s is Michael McMeel, former drummer for the band Three Dog Night. Michael could not have imagined how that first heart-tug would lead him to create a national program that, to date, has touched and changed over 10,000 young lives. The program he would found in 1992 is called Inner City Slickers (ICS).

"The Cowboy way is the ICS way," Michael explains. "The cowboy way is a guide to life. It is the code of the Old West that seems to be missing in today's society—kindness, hard work, responsibility and perseverance. When I was growing up, our heroes were cowboys: Roy Rogers, Gene Autry and the Lone Ranger. These heroes had their own way of looking at life, but there was the common thread that, if followed, made YOUR life better."

Michael started connecting with young folks in the cities long before founding ICS. With his music of course, but also with his TV show, *The Krofft Super Show* with Kaptain Kool and the Kongs, and organizing musical events in churches, synagogues and wherever he could bring young folks together to show them the good that lived inside them. To shine a light on what they could be. It was during that period he realized changing directions of young folks was a real possibility, and he set out determined to do just that. He founded The Awareness Foundation, a non-profit to help "at-risk" children in 1992; the first step in creating Inner City Slickers, the theme inspired by the movie, *City Slickers*.

## SHINING A LIGHT

His first "Slickers" event was on a rented camp not far from Los Angeles. Organizing an

event set with a western theme with ranch activities, horses and a little work and focus, in that one day Michael saw hearts change. Attitudes brighten. Optimistic and encouraged, he bought a small ranch of his own for the purpose of hosting more "Slickers." His dedication to the children and the program, and with help of donors and volunteers, the ICS idea took root and sprouted branches.

Seven years ago he and his wife Erlinda relocated to a farm in Tennessee, which operates as home base and hosts several "Slicker" events a year. But that's just the beginning. The branches that have sprouted now go nationwide, and beyond. There is even a Slicker possibility in Costa Rica!

continued next page



Flying on top of the world.



The first touch is always so special.

"By the end of this year there will be 18 Slicker locations across the country, where young folks come to get a leg up on kindness, dependability, keeping your word, being responsible and learning what it's like to trust and respect the horses, themselves and each other...ethical and moral codes that will stay with them throughout their lives."



“The cowboy way is a guide to life. It is the code of the Old West that seems to be missing in today’s society—kindness, hard work, responsibility and perseverance. When I was growing up, our heroes were cowboys: Roy Rogers, Gene Autry and the Lone Ranger. These heroes had their own way of looking at life, but there was a common thread that, if followed, made YOUR life better.”—Michael McMeel, founder, Inner City Slickers

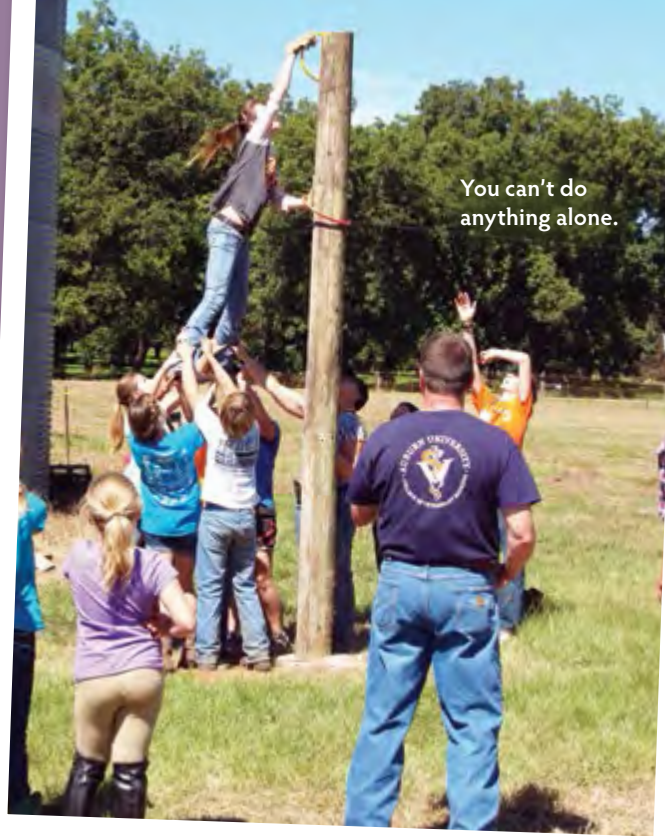
“We don’t find that type of thinking, the Cowboy Code, the Cowboy way of honor and helping others in the world that we live in. Today, it’s all about ‘Me,’ what can you do for me, How does that help me? Life today is tech-

nology, the cool gadgets, and talking

without communicating,” says Michael. “There is a lack of real involvement and participation in the lives of kids and families as a whole. Kids are raised by the world, not their parents. Families disintegrate because of it.”

Michael points out that folks simply don’t understand we are losing too many of our kids. They disappear down the whirlpool of low self-esteem, drugs, crime, mistrust and lost hope. He is dedicated to saving those kids. Inner City Slickers is a remarkable, and fun, program doing just that. “ICS works because it teaches helping, trust and respect.”

What is an Inner City Slicker event? It’s a one-day event hosted by anyone who wants to help at-risk kids, has a few horses and suitable home base, or can find someone who has one. Michael travels to each event and helps with set-up and outreach. He personally sets up the mechanical bull! At-risk children are engaged in western theme, including the “Cowboy Code of Ethics” and ranch activities, and of course plenty of horse time.



You can’t do anything alone.



It only takes a moment to help a child, as shown by Inner City Slickers founder Michael McMeel and friend.





Rockin' on the mechanical bull.

"So as you can see The Cowboy Way is a way of life...a moral compass. It is about being of service—putting other folks first. And as you embrace this philosophy you become a better person, and others benefit also. In my ICS program I often say that we save the horses, horses save the kids, the kids save us. Families are rehabilitated. Everyone wins."

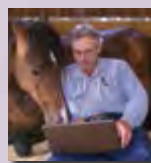
By the end of this year there will be 18 Slicker locations across the country, where young folks come to get a leg up on kindness, dependability, keeping your word, being responsible and learning what it's like to trust and respect the horses, themselves and each other...ethical and moral codes that will stay with them throughout their lives. Can a one-day event do all that? "You bet," Michael says. "We see it over and over. It sets a new course." And they have piles of letters to prove it. "And let's don't forget the follow up. Making sure we keep in touch with these kids, to keep the fire burning is part of the fun, too."

## YOU CAN BE A PART OF IT

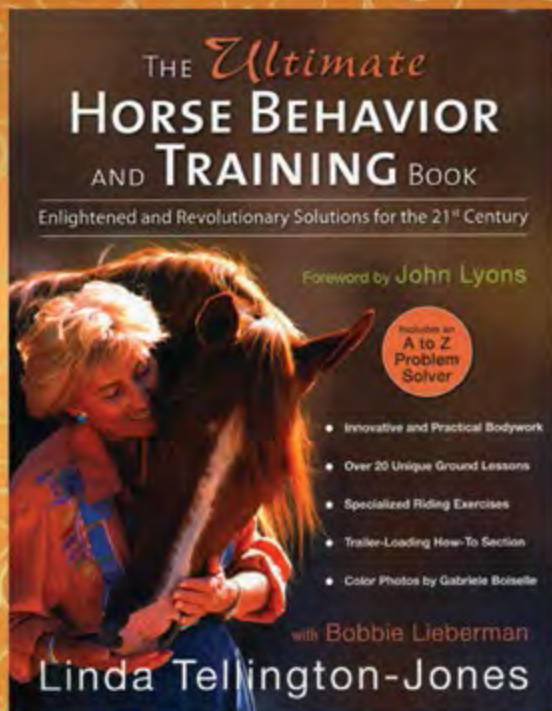
How can you be part of the excitement of changing lives, sparking hope? Many of our Trail Blazer readers and friends already have facilities and horses where you could host an Inner City Slicker Event. Or can make contacts to co-host one at a friend's. Don't worry, you won't be on your own, Michael will personally come to guide you each step of the way from contacting organizations and services who know of children who would benefit to setting up and actually be on hand to help you host your first Slicker. Yes, he travels, a lot!

How can you get started? Contact Michael at [michael@innercityslickers.com](mailto:michael@innercityslickers.com) or call him at 423-289-3820 (home) or 423-489-8614 (cell). Have a look at their website [www.innercityslickers.com](http://www.innercityslickers.com) and Facebook page, and be sure to join their group. There's a lot going on, and many young lives are being changed.

Inner City Slickers knows we have it in us to save these kids. To be the role models, to offer direction and goals. Thank you Michael for offering a hand to so many.



Dutch Henry is a novelist and writer who writes about "People & Horses Helping Horses & People" and resides in Virginia with his wife of 36 years, Robin; along with one horse, dogs, cats and chickens. Dutch also does free "Therapy For Therapy Horse Clinics" at therapeutic riding centers across the country to help horses maintain proper posture, free-and-easy movement and body carriage. You can reach Dutch at [dutchhenry@hughes.net](mailto:dutchhenry@hughes.net) He would love to hear from you. Join his blog at, <http://dutchhenry.blogspot.com> His novel "We'll Have the Summer," is available on Amazon and Dutch's website [www.dutchhenryauthor.com](http://www.dutchhenryauthor.com)



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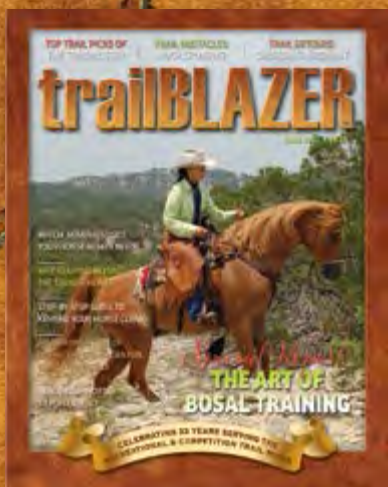
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