



Photo by David Prenatt

Melissa and Aaron Lyon, owners of the Laff 'n' Lyon Ranch, chose their horses based on temperament. Here Melissa stands between the spotted draft horse Sam and the Fresian-Tennessee Walker, Ivy.

# Laff 'n' Lyon

*Horse-drawn wagon rides now being offered in Sherman*

By David Prenatt

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SHERMAN — Aaron and Melissa Lyon, owners of the Laff 'n' Lyon Ranch in Sherman, have recently begun offering horse-drawn wagon rides for public and private affairs, but their real work lies in developing the connection between human and

horse.

"I think horses are one of those animals that are incredibly sensitive to human emotions," Melissa said. "Every day I learn something new from them. Every day, they teach me something new."

While the Laff 'n' Lyon has operated as a horse ranch for five years, it only incor-

porated as a public business in 2019. The couple offers wagon rides for private events such as birthday parties and family gatherings and is also available for more public venues, such as Findley Lake's Christmas through the Village.

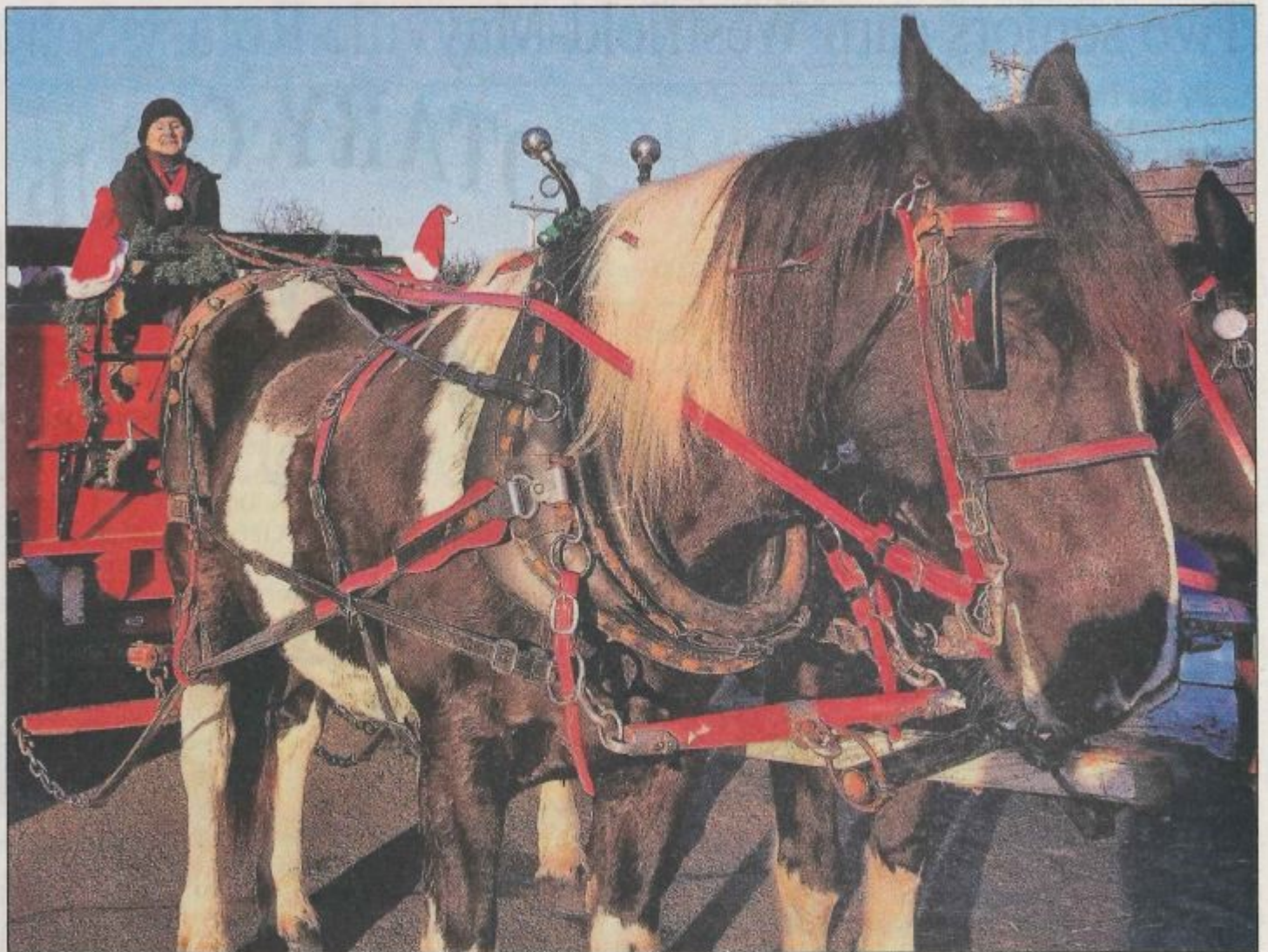
"We just went with a soft launch," Melissa said. "We have a 60 mile or less travel radius."

Nonetheless, the Laff 'n' Lyon Ranch is a work in

progress, following a plan, Melissa said. Five years from now, the couple hopes to offer services at their farm whereby people can stay there and either take part in the farm life and work, or just enjoy the experience of the ranch.

The ranch is not at the point of being self-sustaining, Melissa said, and both she and Aaron have full-time jobs. Melissa is Director of

**See HORSE, Page A5**



The wagon used by Melissa and Aaron Lyon, owners of the Laff 'n' Lyon Ranch, stands covered up, ready for the next engagement.

*HORSE*, From Page 1

the Erie County Department of Health in Erie, PA. However, she says it is her connection with the horses that enables her to carry out her duties. "I couldn't do my professional work without the horses in my life," she said.

One only needs to visit the Laff 'n' Lyon Ranch to understand what she means. Every one of the couple's horses, whether a giant draft horse or a riding horse, or even a miniature, exudes a gentle, curious spirit.

"I always buy for temperament," Melissa said. For instance, she said, when she purchased Reese, a quarter-horse, "I was able to just walk into the stall."

Ivy, the youngest at the age of five, is a Fresian-Tennessee Walker cross. Melissa noted that the Fresians are very sought-after and expensive.

"I told Aaron, there was no way we could afford her," Melissa said. "After five minutes of working

with her, I said 'we have to get her.'"

At the farm, visitors will also meet Rue, an Arabian riding horse and Daisy, a miniature, but it may be the three draft horses that are the most impressive.

Kate, a Belgian draft horse, is the largest of the three, and at 17, is also the oldest. She was their first draft horse.

Melissa has been riding horses since the age of five, but she said it was Aaron who really wanted to learn to drive horses hitched to a wagon. "We tried to do it on our own, but we did not know what we were doing," she said.

The problem lay in the fact that they were harnessing Kate to the wagon improperly, Melissa said. "Once we realized that it was us and not the horse, we set out to find a driving school," she said.

Their answer came in the form of an Amish man, Alvin Yoder, who operated

a horse driving school in Holmes County, OH. "He was the most patient, gentle person I've ever met," Melissa said. "He is the reason for our success today."

Alvin Yoder has since passed away, Melissa said, but before he did, the couple purchased Suzie and Sam, brother and sister draft horses, from him. They are two spotted draft horses who sport a black and red harness and pull a matching red pioneer wagon.

Suzie and Sam were the two horses that provided wagon rides at Findley Lake's Christmas through the Village celebration last month. They not only took riders through the village on December 7 and 8, but also transported them into another era.

The 11-year old draft horses allowed children and adults alike to come close and pet them. Melissa, who drove the wagon, said at the time, "The best thing was meeting the people and

spreading Christmas cheer. The response from the kids was great. Some wanted to go more than once and we let them."

Melissa said the couple follows a methodology known as natural horsemanship in which one works with the horse, rather than trying to dominate it. "It's less about brawn with a horse," Melissa said. "It's about patience, gentleness, and cooperation."

Melissa herself is a perfect example of the wisdom of this methodology. At 4' 10" she seems dwarfed by the massive draft horses. But they bend down to interact with her and they approach her with gentleness and affection. As a result, a visitor has no need to fear any of the horses at the ranch.

So if you "hear those sleigh bells jingling," look for the folks from the Laff 'n' Lyon Ranch. It just may be "lovely weather for a sleigh ride together."