



Beisel

"Volunteering provides me with a sense of satisfaction and general well-being," said Rick Beisel, secretary of the board of directors for Alternatives for Youth in Longmont. "Even if you have a bad day at work, volunteering will make you feel good about yourself."

Beisel, an attorney who practices litigation law in Longmont, finds his legal skills are of service to AFY, launched in 1978 to help at-risk youth succeed in school and avoid drugs.

AFY offers tutoring, mentoring, activities, support, expulsion-prevention programs and alternative education services. In addition, it hosts parent meetings to address topics from gangs to college applications.

Beisel makes sure AFY has adequate insurance and steers the organization away from liability issues.

Recently, questions arose concerning the tax-exempt property status of AFY's building.

"Rick spent hours making phone calls and researching the issue," said AFY's executive director, Deb Roberts.

For more information about Alternatives for Youth or other volunteer opportunities, call Volunteer Connection at 303-444-4904 or visit [www.volunteerconnection.net](http://www.volunteerconnection.net).

— ANGEL ANTIN

**VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES, E2**

**EATON** — Rumors floating through local stables credit her for making celebrity saddles, including one for the queen of England.

Suzie Fletcher-Baker neither confirms nor denies the gossip.

However, at 46, she is one of three master saddlers in the United States, according to The Society of Master Saddlers (UK) Ltd. Web site.

Fletcher-Baker makes a limited number of English saddles each year, about one a month.

The process begins with her quietly walking around the animal, laying hands on him and then pulling out a 24-inch Flexicurve, a tape measure that molds to contours.

After measuring each of about four critical spots along the horse's back, she makes tracings.

Fletcher-Baker also snaps some photos.

Then, she said, she leaves with her head full of ideas on how to build a saddle to help the horse feel great at work.

"Suzie carries it all in a big portfolio, like an artist would," Colleen Cain, a Longmont resident, said of the tracings.

Cain, 45, recently commissioned a saddle for Tiempo, the Dutch warmblood she boards at Jasma Acres in Longmont.

The imposing dark horse with the white blaze stands nearly 18 hands tall, given his remarkably high withers, the highest part of the back at the base of the horse's neck.

"Standard saddles work for most horses, but not for this one," Cain said, brushing her sweaty mount after a Saturday morning workout this month.

"Think of it this way," she continued. "If you're a backpacker, and if the weight's not distributed properly, it hurts. But if it is distributed properly, you can comfortably carry 100 pounds."

Fletcher-Baker's custom-made English saddles start at \$4,500.



In the workshop that her husband built for her in Eaton, Suzie Fletcher-Baker makes custom saddles for customers all over the country.

But she bought her first saddle used in 1973 at age 12 for 50 pounds sterling — about \$25 — with savings from her 25-pence weekly allowance and Christmas money.

That saddle's tree — or backbone — soon snapped.

It happened when she landed a jump at a local horse show on her first horse, Jess, an older grey Welsh cob with black stockings sacrificially given to her by her paternal grandfather.

The break turned out to be a lucky one.

It forced her — then a self-described "bashful, skinny beanpole of a thing" — to visit Ken Langford, the nearest master saddler.

The big man with Elvis sideburns and a booming voice confirmed her fears: The saddle was not worth repairing.

"But he said, 'Well, take it apart, and see what goes on inside,'" Fletcher-Baker said.

She took it home, disassembled it, numbered everything, reassembled it and returned to him with a diagnosis and the declaration of her ambi-

tion to follow in his footsteps.

"He just roared with laughter. He absolutely roared. I felt so silly," she recalled. "Then he said, 'But you're serious, aren't you?'"

Langford, a man she now considers a second father, took her on that very day as an apprentice.

"I was a floor sweeper and tea maker. But all the time, I was watching my master. When it was quiet, I would just sit and watch him," she said of her work on Saturdays and during school holidays.

When Fletcher-Baker graduated at age 16 from public school, she attended a saddlery college — Cordwainers Technical College in Hackney, on London's east end — underwent a seven-year formal apprenticeship and completed a journeyman phase for several years following that.

She and husband James Baker, a native of nearby LaSalle, three years ago moved from Longmont to this barren, 7-acre spot outside of Eaton.

The couple hopes to one day host horses from distant lo-

cales at their fittings.

One aspect recently came

Instead of ramshackle near their 1 Fletcher-Baker the small, o that Baker

"She used Eskimo," he which had n ditioning.

"I was sub Fletcher-Ba in her eye a leather.

Now, with tablished, s tle.

Instead, s at 6 a.m. Th tures the cr needs before hide, pigski

"I still ca tions," Flet Langford, n ter saddler say, 'You kr

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