

staying at a nearby cottage for the weekend. As some rode the sleigh, others spent time with the horses; learning about them, feeding and petting them. It was such a memorable experience for them that many came back the following summer to reconnect with the horses. The family who owns the cottage where the kids were staying are regular visitors to the farm. "They have become a part of our farm family," says Foyston.

Patricia and Gord Kidder of Milford Bay were looking for a special way to celebrate Valentine's Day and entertain some out-of-town guests. Patricia surfed the Internet to find a business in Muskoka that offered sleigh rides. After calling one business, she was referred to Back of Beyond.

The Kidders and their guests arrived at Back of Beyond and were pleasantly surprised.

"I've been on sleigh rides before. You get on, have a ride and get off. But this was a totally different experience," Gord explains. "Cathy was just so welcoming and knowledgeable about horses. We arrived and she wanted to introduce us to all the horses. She gave us all kinds of insight into the horses' behaviour and reactions to people. We had a little bucket of treats and handed out healthy treats to all the horses. It was really interesting."

Meeting the horses and giving them treats was a favourite part of the ride for Cathy Denardis and her family. Denardis and her children, Halle and Nathan of Port Sydney, have enjoyed Back of Beyond sleigh rides on several occasions.

"The couple of times I've been out there they've been really generous with their time and very explanatory of the horses and everything that goes on there," says Denardis of her experience.

"Often people are interested in the horses," Foyston explains. "The ride is a fun thing but they are very intrigued about getting to know the horses. They want to get up close and personal with the horses. Although it is a sleigh ride, it's a bit more of a whole horse experience."

Foyston says she wants visitors to take away something meaningful from their sleigh ride experience.

"I hope that they understand a little bit about horses; they can appreciate the sensitivity and the majesty of horses," explains Foyston. She adds that she hopes children get an appreciation of the horse as a living being.

Neuteboom hopes participants will gain a higher appreciation of horses and the role they still can play in our lives.

"Since our adventures include an equine educational component as well as the novelty of dashing through the snow in a one horse open sleigh, we hope that participants will garner a higher appreciation of the role horses still maintain in all our lives," says Neuteboom.

"Horses have played an integral and important role as faithful companions to humans since the dawn of history, and no other animal has contributed as much to our own evolution; they tend to evoke an emotional response from every person who comes in contact with them," she concludes.

But everyone takes something different away with them after a sleigh ride. It may be enjoying time spent with the horses, or the nostalgia of a



Guests at Back of Beyond can enjoy a large multi-passenger sleigh or a cozy cutter.

sleigh ride, or seeing the beauty of Muskoka in a different way and at a different pace.

"More than simply being show horses, work animals or beasts of burden, our horses sincerely enjoy their work, are gregarious and social, and really seem to connect with the people involved in their lives," says Neuteboom.

It's that connection with the horses and the people at Back of Beyond that guests remember. The sleigh ride is the draw but it is about the whole experience being unique.

"For everybody it will be a little different. I haven't had anyone who hasn't left feeling better about themselves," explains Foyston.

The Kidders not only thoroughly enjoyed themselves when they visited the farm for a sleigh ride, but left with a better understanding of horses.

"It was absolutely marvelous," says Patricia Kidder. "The people were so welcoming and caring

and those horses . . . They are so intuitive and amazing. I would go back again any time."

And in fact, they did.

The Kidders were so thrilled with the farm experience, they made certain they returned to Back of Beyond in the spring to meet the new foals,

"Whether our guests are moved by the sense of nostalgia of a time gone by, thrilled by the romance of a sleigh ride through open fields or woods, or encouraged by the desire to learn more about the wonderful world of horses, we delight in sharing our passion of these beautiful animals," concludes Neuteboom.

On a cold, wintery day, safely wrapped in a blanket that smells of fresh air and hay, on a sleigh pulled by a powerful Belgian or beautiful Friesian, the sunlight on freshly fallen snow glistens like diamonds, beckoning you to explore woodland trails at the Back of Beyond. 