

The roof and wainscoting were up, and workers had started putting steel walls on the east side of the 70-foot by 192-foot structure.



Rafael Hernandez, of Sturgis, Michigan, works on the new barn at Exceptional Equestrians Unlimited in Hobart Friday, Jan. 21, 2022. Workers were rebuilding after the roof collapsed during a February snow storm. (Andy Lavalley for the Post-Tribune) (Post-Tribune)

Dan Hernandez, the crew's manager, said their portion of the job — framing the building and installing exterior walls and one inside wall — should be done the first week in February.

He said fortunately, the weather has been cooperating.

After that, work will begin on the plumbing, electrical and some stalls inside the barn.

Mellon said the primary directive is to at least start having some riding lessons this spring again.



Daniel Hernandez shares a tool with Eliazar Correa while working on the new barn at Exceptional Equestrians Unlimited in Hobart, Indiana, Friday, Jan. 21, 2022. (Andy Lavalley for the Post-Tribune) (Post-Tribune)

The horses were rescued by police officers and firefighters after the collapse and have been housed in four separate locations as the group raised funds for the new barn, which Mellon estimated will cost around \$350,000 to \$400,000.

She said insurance paid for a small portion of the cost and the remainder is being raised through fundraisers and donations.

“The kids are ecstatic. Many are coming to visit the horses, but they can’t ride them with no arena,” Mellon said.

While the new barn is actually smaller than the old one, Mellon said it’s configured differently, allowing for an arena and the ability to have 15 stalls.



Exceptional Equestrians Unlimited treasurer Pam Mellon at the site of the group's new barn in Hobart Friday, Jan. 21, 2022. (Andy Lavalley for the Post-Tribune) (Post-Tribune)

She said Exceptional Equestrians is only for children and adults born with disabilities, such as autism, ADHD, Down syndrome and multiple sclerosis. They must present a doctor's note saying the therapeutic service would help them, Mellon said.

"The kids get to hug and ride the horses, some saddle them, too," Mellon said. "They think of the horse as their horse and almost always get the same horse and the same volunteer to help."

Exceptional Equestrians has been at different locations in the Region for decades, but only four years at its current address, 5699 E. 73rd Ave., Merrillville.

Over the years, Mellon said she's seen the positive effect the horses have had on their riders.

"It gives you goose bumps. These kids feel on top of the world when they're on top of the horse," she said.



Daniel Hernandez uses a lift while working on the new barn at Exceptional Equestrians Unlimited in Hobart, Friday, Jan. 21, 2022. Milmar Post Builders, of LaGrange, Indiana, is rebuilding the more than 13,000 square-foot barn that collapsed during heavy snow last February. (Andy Lavalley for the Post-Tribune) (Post-Tribune)

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