



Deedee O'Brien is the Executive Director of Challenge Unlimited at Ironstone Farm, a position she has held since the organization's incorporation in 1983. Under Deedee's guidance, together with the Founder of Ironstone, Richard Donovan, Challenge Unlimited has grown from a small, grass roots non-profit organization to one of the largest therapeutic riding programs in the nation, serving more than 500 individuals each week with a staff of 16 licensed therapists and instructors and more than 200 volunteers. Challenge Unlimited collaborates with 26 service organizations to bring the "therapy of the horse" to people with a wide range of disabilities and backgrounds, thus making Ironstone Farm a center of rehabilitation for Greater Boston, the Merrimack Valley, the North Shore of Massachusetts, and Southern New Hampshire.

In 1997, Deedee started the Ironstone Therapy program to serve individuals with physical disability by providing physician prescribed physical and occupational therapy through "hippotherapy" – or "treatment with the use of the horse". Ironstone Therapy has been a ground breaker in the industry for serving children in the "0-3' age group through Early Intervention. Today, Ironstone Therapy contracts with 12 Early Intervention organizations throughout the Commonwealth. Ironstone Therapy was incorporated in 1998 as a separate non-profit 501(c)(3) organization.

From 1999 to 2001, Deedee brought the non-profit Challenge Unlimited through a major capital campaign that raised \$640,000, enabling the purchase of the 14 acre, \$3,000,000 Ironstone Farm property in Andover, Massachusetts. Today, Challenge Unlimited is well known in the community and Ironstone Farm has become a center for rehabilitation, education, and recreation for more than 90 cities and towns. Since purchasing Ironstone Farm, the organization raised another \$750,000 to build a state-of-the-art heated indoor riding facility to be completed in Fall 2009. In 2008 Challenge Unlimited purchased the abutting property through MassDevelopment tax-exempt bond financing to create after-school programs for children with disabilities in the arts.

Prior to her involvement with Challenge Unlimited, Deedee taught high school English and History at the Greater Lowell Regional Vocational Technical School, and at the Lowell High Night School diploma granting program. She was also involved in state, county and local 4-H Youth and Family Development programs, serving as co-leader with Richard Donovan of the 40-50 member Ironstone 4-H Club for 15 years, as assistant to the Cooperative Extension Agents for Middlesex County in 1970-73, as the Secretary for the Essex County 4-H Club Foundation in 1996, and as a Foundation Board Member from 1998 through 2002.

Deedee graduated from the University of New Hampshire with a major in Occupational Education in 1973, and completed her teaching certification requirements in English and History at Northeastern University in 1975. Other activities include starting the Therapeutic Riding Research Committee, active from 1992 to the present; maintaining memberships in the Rotary Club of Andover and the Kiwanis Club of Greater Lawrence from 2000 to the present, as well as the Pine Grove Grange of Bath, New Hampshire since 2003. Deedee also spent twenty years part time at the New England racetracks during the 1970s and 1980s as groom, exercise rider and assistant trainer working with thoroughbred race horses.