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Horse lovers in Dawson Creek must think they have died and gone to heaven. And their trusty steeds must think they have died and gone to horse heaven. After being opened for a couple of months, you'd be hard pressed to find anyone who uses the Lakota Agri-Centre utter a bad word about the brand new facility.

"We love it. It is beautiful here. We are using it as much as we can. We could use it more, but everybody wants to use it and we all have to share," said Rose Cousins, the president of the Dawson Creek Horse Club. Throughout the week just about every horse activity imaginable takes place in the facility. The Monday to Friday 3-7 p.m. time slot is set aside for stall renters to exercise their horses and youngsters who ride. There are also several times set aside each week for basic lessons including jumping, English and Western riding lessons. Various user groups rent the facility at other times during the week. Barrel racers use it Thursday nights. The team ropers are in it every Friday night. The jumpers are there Monday nights and steer wrestlers are often training Saturday nights.

Prior to the facility being built as part of the larger South Peace Community Multiplex, horse lovers had to train at a friend's indoor arena, outside during the summer or in an arena at the Dawson Creek fairgrounds that was clearly unsuitable. The previous Dawson Creek facility was condemned several years ago, so horse enthusiasts used a smaller arena at the fairgrounds but that was unsuitable as it wasn't big enough. "We have been without a proper arena for about four years now. We couldn't have our jumping clinics there. We had to use someone else's facility or the outdoors because it (previous facility) is too small. The

stable and arena association put some money into it, but there was only so much that could be done with the old facility and it had limited space," recalled Cousins.

Now that the Christmas holidays are over, the Lakota Agri-Centre will probably get even busier, expects Tracy Isaak, a barrel racer, team roper and secretary of the Dawson Creek Stable Users Association. "It is awesome. It is incredible. It is getting a lot of use and the peak time will be from January until the end of March because after Christmas people are motivated to get their horses in shape and get ready for spring." And the glowing reviews aren't just coming from the locals. Dee Butterfield, a former champion barrel racer who has competed, trained and taught in facilities all over North America for well over 40 years was clearly impressed. During a barrel racing clinic Dec. 7-9, she pointed out that the facility will improve the local riders' skills as they now have somewhere to train during the winter. "I haven't seen a comparable facility in Western Canada. This is phenomenal and it is going to make the riders that much better. They have done a good job. I am very, very impressed and happy to teach in it."

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