



A home for horses

Hope in the Valley offers second chance for horses

By Julie Clements

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El Dorado, Kan. — Horses that are no longer wanted, that are starving, or whose owners simply can't take care of them anymore have been given a second chance at Hope in the Valley Equine Rescue and Sanctuary near Valley Center.

Thirty-two horses of nearly every breed and age can be found at Hope in the Valley, one of only three horse rescue facilities in the state.

"Some are owner relinquishments," said Ande Miller, founder of Hope in the Valley, a 501(c)3 organization.

Others are seized by Sedgwick County Animal Control and taken to Miller's rescue.

"I get calls from all over the state every day," she said.

Some of the horses are involved in long court cases for neglect.

One in particular Miller received as a baby in a starvation case.

"When they are starved as a baby their growth is stunted," she explained, pointing out a smaller horse.

"We get a lot of abandonments out in the county," she continued as she walked among the horses, which surrounded her for attention.

She said sometimes the owner dies and the family members can't care for the horse or a person gets transferred to another job.

"We have a lot of race horses here," she said. "We have a lot of illegal race tracks and if they are not winning they (people) just abandon them."

Miller said they never put a saddle or even blanket on them until they get the horses back up to weight.

She also sees older horses that are starving because they are not given the right kind of food that they can chew.

Miller gets them a special processed grain.

"It's amazing what the right kind of food does," she said.

Her oldest horse right now is 32.

"Most of these old horses have been around all those years for a reason," she said, explaining that you know anyone can ride them.

"The majority of these horses that come to us have issues," she said.

They get horses that have been beaten, whipped and kicked.

"They have a lot of trust issues," she said.

Miller and a number of volunteers work with the horses to help them overcome these issues.

They also get sent to a trainer once they are 2 years old.

"People want to be able to ride them," she explained.

Among the horses she has is the granddaughter of Secretariat and also a fifth generation horse from Secretariat that had been starved.

Secretariat was an American Thoroughbred racehorse, who in 1973 became the first U.S. Triple Crown champion in 25 years.

Some of the horses she has around a couple of weeks before they are adopted while others may be there four to five years.

Those interested in adopting a horse can go out to the rescue and see the horse, ride them and see how they behave in order to make a good match.

Miller said if a person adopts a horse and then can't care for it, there is a contractual agreement that the horse goes back to her.

"We don't ask any more than to just take care of them the way they should be taken care of," she said.

Miller's first rescue horse was named Jim. She saw him at a sale in Hutchinson in 2005. He was just a skeleton at the time and was surrounded by all of these horses with their own issues. She knew he would get trampled if put in a trailer with other horses to be taken to slaughter and didn't want him to die that way.

The 30-year-old horse was grossly underweight and only had three teeth remaining.

"I said I'm not leaving without that horse today," she said.

And she didn't.

They brought him back to their home, where they had him for the next five years, finally losing him last year.

Jim traveled with them to their special events, such as camps, fall fests and parades.

"He was our mascot and inspiration for this place," Miller said.

After that they started going to sales and bringing home other horses.

"It just kind of ballooned from there," she said.

Now she works to save as many horses as she can.

"I couldn't do this without my volunteers and board of directors," she said.

Volunteers can do any number of chores from mucking stalls to watering and feeding horses to brushing them and riding them.

"Even if you stand out here and love on them and brush them," Miller said. "You don't have to have lots of experience."

They also have work days when they do such things as fix fences and trim trees.

Those interested in volunteering can e-mail volunteer@hivemas.org. They will give volunteers an orientation to explain what needs to be done.

Miller said they don't have any paid employees and all donations go to buying grain and hay and caring for the horses. There is a minimal adoption fee for the horses to help cover expenses.

Miller's goal is simple – to get the horses healthy and get them adopted.

"That's the part that makes you feel good and feel like you accomplished something," she said. "When you see where they came from. We can't save them all but we can make a dent in it."

For more on Hope in the Valley, visit www.hopeinthevalleyequinerescue.org.

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