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Hannah Dykstra brushes a horse at Hope in the Valley Feb. 23. Dykstra is one of several volunteers the rescue relies upon to care for the animals.

Local horse rescue reaches milestone

By Chris Strunk

Last Updated: February 28, 2020

Ande Armstrong started Hope in the Valley Equine Rescue & Sanctuary with a couple of horses and a dream. She had no idea what it would become.

"The horses just kept coming and coming, just growing and growing and growing," she said.

Now, 15 years later, the Valley Center non-profit passed what many in the organization thought would be an unreachable milestone. It took in its 400th equine over the weekend.

"That's a lot," Armstrong said.

Actually, the four miniature donkeys and one miniature horse rescued from a property in Kingman County were numbers 397 through 401.

"This is a big deal for us, a real big deal," said Kelly Benton, a member of the Hope in the Valley Board of Directors.

Hope in the Valley receives seized and surrendered horses and donkeys at the horse farm it rents from Armstrong at 9025 N. Broadway. The organization is run by volunteers and an active board of directors with a passion for horses.

"We love these animals," said board member Joyce Corp said. "Our mission is to give them a better life. They are very deserving of better lives."

The organization is funded by donations, grants and fundraisers. It can be an expensive operation, with food and medical care, Corp said.

Each year, Hope in the Valley goes through about 450 bales of hay, which cost about \$50 each.

At times, Hope in the Valley has turned away animals.

"We will if we have too many horses out here," Corp said. "We turned one down because the horses had not been handled in three years. We couldn't take on that liability. It is very difficult to say no. We have got to have the realization, though, that we cannot save them all."

After an animal has been nursed back to health, Hope in the Valley then tries to get it adopted through a strict vetting process.

That's what should happen with the five that came in over the weekend.

One of the donkeys, the smallest of the group, however, may not make it.

"The little one, he fell down and we had to pick him up," Corp said. "... Our concern with these guys is, No. 1, they're going to need medical care. No. 2, we've got two intact males that need to be gelded. No. 3 is food. They've eaten non-stop since they came in this afternoon."

If they survive, the donkeys will have little trouble finding an adoptive home.

"Donkeys are popular," Corp said. "... They are absolutely wonderful at keeping coyotes away. They protect other animals on the property. Donkeys are really valuable animals. When we get them in, they don't last very long. They're fantastic animals. They all deserve a better life than what they've been given so far."

Armstrong said Hope in the Valley couldn't exist without its volunteers.

Armstrong is still president of the board. However, illness last year and an accident in the fall, during which she lost a pinky finger on her left hand, have kept her on the sidelines until recently.

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

Barrel races

Hope in the Valley will start a new fundraiser this spring.

Beginning April 10, the organization will host a barrel racing series at its new arena on the property at 9025 N. Broadway. The series will be every other Friday night through the summer. It also will include other horse-related events and food trucks.

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