

Valley Center



Ribs show through the skin on Holly, a 25-year-old horse found in a Butler County pasture. Holly died March 13.

Dying horse has rescue group seeking answers

By Chris Strunk

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Ande Miller called it one of the worst cases of neglect she has seen in some time. Now, she's pushing Butler County authorities to do something about it.

Miller, one of the directors of the Valley Center-based Hope in the Valley horse shelter and rescue, said Holly, a 25-year-old horse, was skin and bones when the shelter took her in March 11.

Despite the shelter's efforts, Holly was too ill to live. She had to be euthanized.

"Someone needs to be held accountable for this," Miller said. "The person who had her, the caretaker, should have been responsible for her care."

Miller said Holly was living on dead weeds in a pasture between Rose Hill and Douglass.

The local shelter received a phone call about Holly from a rescue in Nebraska, which was alerted to the horse from a Butler County resident.

"They networked to us because we're the closest rescue," Miller said. "We went to look at the horse and sure enough, she's on death's door."

Miller said she and another shelter director talked to the caretaker and discovered the owner lived in California. The caretaker said the owner

was not sending enough money to care for the horse.

Miller said she talked to the owner, who said she did not know how the horse was doing. The owner relinquished the horse to Hope in the Valley. Two days later, she was on the ground and couldn't get back up.

Miller said she talked to a deputy with the Butler County Sheriff's Office. She showed pictures of the horse. Later, Miller was told law enforcement officers talked to the caretaker and to the owner but could not prove the horse was intentionally neglected.

Miller said Holly had trouble absorbing nutrients from food, but so-called senior feed would have helped the horse.

Miller said the caretaker told her the owner directed that Holly be cut off from any high-priced food.

"Someone should have been taking care of that horse," Miller said. "To let her slowly starve to death and blame it on an absorption problem is not right. I honestly don't know how this horse made it through the first winter. I didn't think it could get worse, but this was worse."

Miller said she wants to talk to the county attorney's office about Holly.

"Just because a horse is old doesn't mean they have to be starved like that," Miller said. "Someone's going to have to step up to the plate and take responsibility for this."