

Rescue groups see surge in abandoned animals Homes, hope for horses



Photos by Travis Haying/The Wichita Eagle

Ande Miller of Hope in the Valley Equine Rescue and Sanctuary works with a colt. Hope in the Valley has seen an increase in the number of horses it takes in; Miller cites the economy as a factor. "Their owners can't or don't want to take care of them," she said.

The Wichita Eagle

Hope ran out earlier this week for Emmett, the skinny 7-month-old colt born with crooked legs.

He was in pain, a veterinarian determined, and was euthanized. But there is still a future for Harley and Lady, two draft horses in need of a home. And Jackson and Nala, both quarter horses, broke to ride.

These five horses are part of a growing trend, shelter operators say. More horses are being abandoned for a variety of reasons, including the poor economy.

"Their owners can't or don't want to take care of them and turn them loose," said Ande Miller, president and founder of the Hope in the Valley Equine Rescue and Sanctuary, near 95th North and Broadway.

"Animal control picks them up and brings them to us. We are getting more starved and neglected animals."

Rescue groups like Miller's take in the horses, then try to find adoptive homes for them. But the rising costs of grain and hay — and a decrease in donations — is making it more difficult, she said.

The 3-year-old shelter normally cares for 10 to 15 abandoned horses at a time, Miller said. In recent months, that number

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View a video about how Hope in the Valley Equine Rescue and Sanctuary plans to care for the neglected horses.



Two horses recover from malnourishment at Hope in the Valley. Rescue groups take in abandoned and neglected horses, then try to find adoptive homes for them.

How to HELP RESCUE GROUPS

■ To help Hope in the Valley Equine Rescue and Sanctuary, call 316-519-4129, visit www.hopeinthevalleyequinerescue.org or write to Hope in the Valley Equine Rescue and Sanctuary, 9025 N. Broadway, Valley Center, KS 67147. The group needs money and square bales of bromo or prairie hay.

■ To help Rainbow Meadows Equine Rescue and Retirement, call 620-725-3402, visit www.rainbowmeadowsranch.com or write to Rainbow at 1949 Dalton, Sedan, KS 67361.

Please see HORSES, Page 4A

NEWS 2 USE

HORSES

From Page 1A

has jumped to 25 to 30 animals. Some horses are at the shelter for years; some are there less than a month before being adopted.

Emmett arrived at the rescue sanctuary after Sedgwick County animal control officers seized him and other horses that had been found without food or water.

The county can seize horses or work with owners to bring the animals up to health standards.

Not just the economy

Because of the holiday, county officials could not provide exact numbers of abandoned horses this week. But they said a number of factors play into an increase in the number of horses that need attention.

"The economy enters into it but it is just one of the issues," said Glen Wiltse, director of Sedgwick County's code enforcement, which supervises the animal control department.

"Your older horses require higher-priced feed to maintain the rate of health. They require more care. People want them but sometimes forget they have to have all the special care."

Karen Everhart, executive director and co-founder of

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Rainbow Meadows Equine Ranch and Retirement near Sedan, said rescue groups are more visible now.

Because of television shows on the Animal Planet cable channel, there is greater awareness and willingness by the public to report animal abuse, she said.

Recent legislation at local, state and federal levels has allowed authorities to step in sooner than before, Everhart said.

Hard decisions

Wichita veterinarian Jason Kiser is often consulted by Miller's rescue group.

"We notice these horses aren't having the care they need," said Kiser, of Equine Surgery & Medicine. "With the economy the way it is, people are having trouble making ends meet. They are not able to take care of the horses like they would want."

For some, as in the case of Emmett, hard decisions are made.

"It's not that there is no more hope, but this is not a functional animal for anybody to use," Kiser said. "He would have been able to continue living but you are stuck paying for his feed and care."

"He was sore. He had pain in his back legs. These are unwanted animals and something has to happen rather than let them starve to death."

Animal control officers regularly bring horses to Miller's horse rescue group near Valley Center.

"The ones we got in the last month were starving," Miller said. "Some have bad teeth.

Others are needing a really good hoof trimming and dewormed."

It costs typically between \$1,500 and \$2,500 a year to maintain a horse, not including veterinary costs, Miller said. Depending on the horse, it may cost between \$200 to \$500 to adopt a horse from her group.

In the meantime, it costs to keep them alive.

"We rely mostly on donations and my paycheck," said Miller, who works full time as a nurse at Wesley Medical Center. "The donations are down to trickles."

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