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Hope for abused horses

■ Hope in the Valley Equine Rescue and Sanctuary cares for horses that otherwise would have no future.

BY DIANE MCCARTNEY
The Wichita Eagle

Ande Miller has had a big heart for horses for most of her life — since she was 13 and her grandparents bought her her first horse.

Since 1985, Miller, 50, has kept horses of her own on the 80 acres she owns in Valley Center, riding, feeding and caring for the animals before and after her full-time job as a nurse at Wesley Medical Center in Wichita.

But she also had a dream — of starting a rescue and sanctuary for abused and abandoned horses — horses that no one else cared about.

"I'd thought about it for years and years and years," Miller said. It was a horse named Jim that "got the ball rolling" toward the realization of that dream.

In September 2005, Miller was attending the Kansas State Fair when she heard about a horse sale in Hutchinson and decided to check it out. What she saw saddened and sickened her.

"There were about 300 horses there, from little babies to every kind of horse," Miller said. Some had broken legs; others had open wounds. Most were being sold for slaughter.

As Miller walked around and looked into the different corrals, one horse kept catching her eye.

"There was this horse standing out there that just literally was a skeleton," she said.

"I was so in shock that people let their horses get in that kind of shape."

There were many horses at the sale that needed help, Miller said but she found herself going back again and again to the bony bay thoroughbred with the black mane.

"I just decided right then I was taking him home."

The horse was so weak, Miller said, she wasn't sure he'd make the trip.

"But I thought, if he dies in my pasture the next week, at least he didn't die in a slaughter truck."

Miller got the horse home and began feeding him a handful of grain every four hours, helping his delicate digestive system to adjust.

She contacted his former owners and learned that his name was Jim and that he was more than 30 years old.

After three months, Jim — who has no teeth — had gained 300 pounds, and Hope in the Valley Equine Rescue and Sanctuary was born.

"He's kind of our mascot," Miller says of Jim. "He'll be with us forever."

The rescue currently is caring for eight rescued horses, purchased at sales or relinquished by owners who could no longer care for them.

It also serves as a temporary home for horses seized by Sedgwick County animal control, Miller said.

Some of the rescued horses — including a miniature horse named Sis — are just now getting healthy enough to be offered for adoption, Miller said.

Others — like Jim and a blind Palomino named Trigger — will live out the rest of their lives at the sanctuary.



Travis Hoving/The Wichita Eagle

Ande Miller pets a young paint horse named Thunder at Hope in the Valley Equine Rescue and Sanctuary, in Valley Center. The nonprofit corporation rescues horses from inhumane conditions and rehabilitates them to prepare them for adoption.

Now you know CARING FOR HORSES

With good care, a horse can live 35 years or more. Here are some general guidelines:

■ Even routine horse care is a significant and ongoing expense. The cost of purchasing a horse is often much less than the cost of maintaining one for a year. Make sure you are realistic about your ability to afford quality care before you adopt an equine companion.

■ Horses need a regular supply of food. In most cases, they need to have hay or pasture throughout the day, with additional grain feedings twice a day. An average-size horse will eat about 20 pounds of food a day and drink at least eight gallons of water.

■ Horses need regular hoof care. Plan to hire a farrier (blacksmith) every six to eight weeks for routine hoof trimming or shoeing.

■ Horses need regular veterinary care. At least once a year, your horse will need to be vaccinated against tetanus and other diseases.

The veterinarian will also provide routine dental care.

■ Because horses are constantly exposed to intestinal worms from the ground they graze on, they must be dewormed every six to eight weeks.

■ Horses need constant access to a dry, safe, comfortable shelter to protect them from rain, wind and snow. In warm and sunny weather, the shelter will provide much-needed shade. At a minimum, you should have a well-constructed, three-sided shed into which your horse can retreat at all times. You will need to remove manure from the stall or shelter every day.

■ Horses need exercise. To supplement the exercise your horse will get when you ride him, he should have a paddock or pasture in which to relax and stroll. The pasture should be bordered by safe, sturdy fencing.

Source: Humane Society of the United States

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Hope in the Valley Equine Rescue and Sanctuary needs cash donations to help buy feed, medications and farrier and veterinarian services for horses. All donations are tax deductible.

Anyone interested in donating, volunteering, adopting a horse or being a foster home can call Ande Miller at 316-519-4129 or 316-755-2826 or e-mail hopeinthevalley@prilus.net.

Vic McMullen runs a similar horse rescue, Southern Winds Equine Rescue and Recovery Center, in Wellington and has similar needs.

For more information or to donate, visit the Web site www.southernwindsaquinerescue.org/index.html; call 316-858-3233; or e-mail vmcmul505@earthlink.net.

"It's an education thing," she said. "Kids want a pony — well, buying the pony is the cheap part. Taking care of it after that is the expensive part."

Horses must be dewormed and have their hooves trimmed every couple of months, and they need yearly vaccinations, Miller said.

"And that's not counting hay and feed."

In spite of the costs, Miller said she hopes to add more horses to the rescue and sanctuary.

"If we had the money to do it, we would have hundreds of horses," she said.

Reach Diane McCartney at 316-268-8593 or dmccartney@wichitaeeagle.com.

HAVE A QUESTION ON

One horse who's on his way to a new home is Thunder, a colt born at the rescue in May to a sickly paint mare that Miller and co-director Lisa Allen bought at an El Dorado auction.

The mare, named Strawberry, had been left in a pasture for about nine years to fend for herself, Miller said. Her health problems were so severe that she finally had to be euthanized.

But happy endings are in store for other rescued horses. Two 2-year-olds that had been starved and were being sold for slaughter are fattening up nicely, Miller

said, although she thinks they will always be small.

Feeding and caring for the horses gets expensive, and Hope in the Valley relies on donations and occasional fundraisers to pay the bills.

When the costs — which run about \$1,200 a month — exceed donations, Miller says she makes up the difference out of her own pocket.

If people would think carefully before buying or breeding a horse, fewer horses would end up abused or being sold for slaughter, Miller said.

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