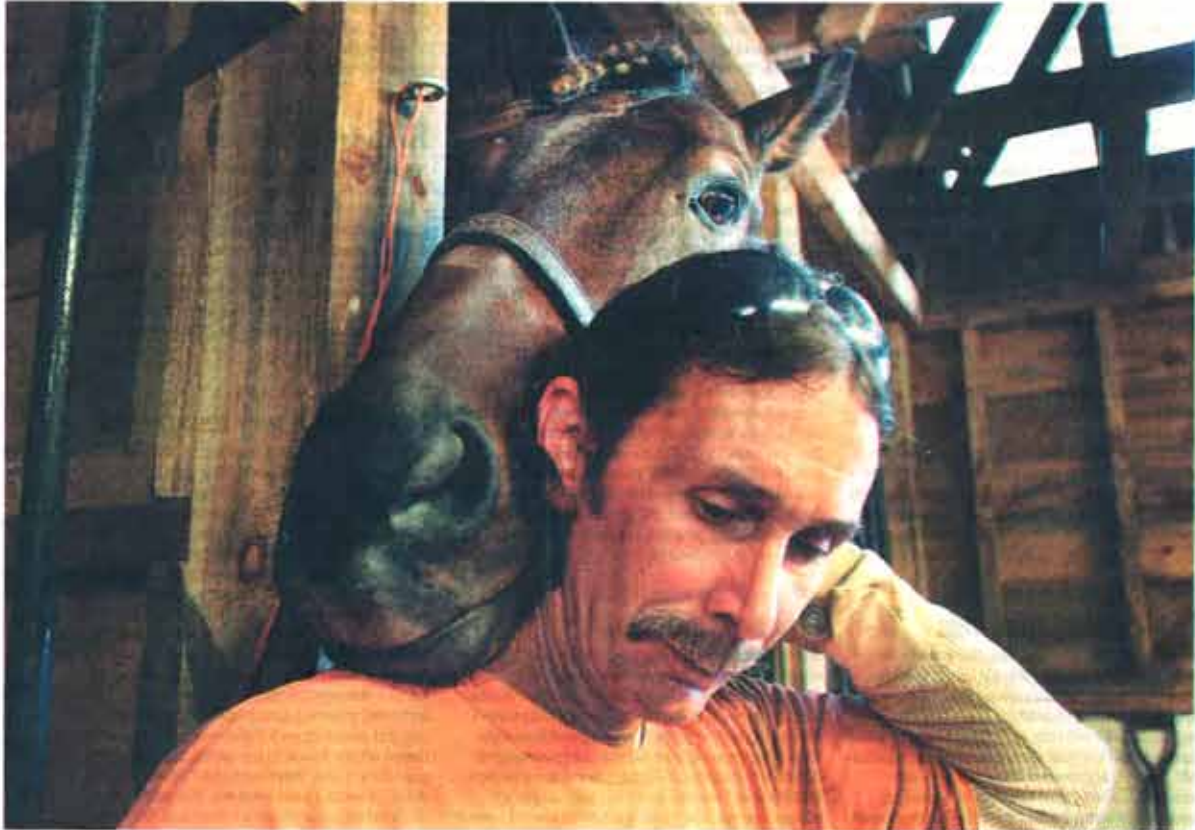


The Boston Globe

Sunday, November 20, 2011



PHOTOS BY JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF

At the Plymouth County Sheriff's Farm, inmate Paul Qualter is nuzzled by Sunshine, a retired racehorse from Suffolk Downs racetrack in East Boston.

A stable influence

At farm, prison inmates care for retired horses

By Rich Fahey
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

PLYMOUTH — There is no Social Security or Medicare for thoroughbred horses that reach the end of their racing careers; just a few years ago, their end would probably have come at a slaughterhouse.

Today there's a local program that provides refuge for the animals, and in some cases allows them to have a second career.

The Second Chance program began in 2009 when Suffolk Downs racetrack in East Boston, in conjunction with the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation and with help from the Fields Family Foundation, established a home for retired racehorses at the Plymouth County Sheriff's Farm, the last county-owned farm in the state. Inmates from the Plymouth County Correctional Facility now care for the horses as part of the prison's vocational program.

There are eight retired thoroughbreds romping on a 13-acre pasture at the farm today, with room for two more horses. There is also a 50-by-100-foot

RACEHORSES, Page 8



Resident horses strike up a conversation as inmate John Jancaltis of Hull works in the barn. The farm, which has room for 10 horses at a time, is now housing eight.

At Sheriff's Farm, inmates care for retired racehorses

► RACEHORSES

Continued from Page 1

shelter, with stalls, for the animals.

On a recent rainy morning, inmates John Jancaitis, 60, of Hull, and Paul Qualter, 47, of Hanover, were working with the horses — cleaning stalls, feeding and walking the animals, cleaning their hooves, and doling out occasional treats, such as apples, carrots, and peppermints.

A veterinarian makes regular visits to check on the animals' progress and to assess whether they are ready for adoption.

"Some of the horses like to nip, and you always have to be alert for a kick," said Qualter, who has been working at the stable since May. "I'd never really been around horses before this, and now I know each one by their personality."

As he spoke, a horse named Energy Center nuzzled and pushed himself against Qualter, eager for attention.

"They know you and become like your pets," said Jancaitis, who has been on the job for six weeks. "These animals are good around people because of their experience at the racetrack. The only problem is some of them don't get along. Sunshine, for instance, doesn't always play well with others." He pointed to a corner stall where a horse, presumably Sunshine, was whinnying.

Captain Dan Callahan of the sheriff's office said all the inmates who work on the farm are carefully screened before beginning work and that only nonviolent offenders are considered; the prison houses approximately 1,600 individuals, and only several dozen meet the criteria to work within the community, under the supervision of officers.

Because the same inmates are usually on duty and are aware of the horses' prior injuries, they are able to determine when horses are lame, aren't eating, or need special attention.

Christina Sawelsky of Sharon first adopted a horse through the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation in 1998. She had to put down the horse in 2010, and told

the foundation she would like to adopt another retired thoroughbred.

She was referred to the Plymouth farm a few months after it opened and given a list of five horses up for adoption, including Sing Me Back Home, who was 13 and had had 114 racing starts. She adopted him in April 2010, and he has since gone on to a new career on the hunter/jumper circuit and has also done some barrel racing, a rodeo event in which a horse and rider attempt to complete a cloverleaf pattern around preset barrels in the fastest time.

Sawelsky said that while she was adopting Sing Me Back Home she also fell in love with 7-year-old Charley Business, who strongly resembled her former horse but suffered from a bowed tendon that restricts his activities. She adopted him in May 2010 and uses him for pleasure riding, a lot of it at nearby Borderland State Park.

"He's kind of a lawn ornament," she said with a laugh.

The county farm is a nice transition for the horses after their racing careers, said Sawelsky. "They're turned out and do nothing but be a horse," she said. "It's good for their brains."

A component of the county farm program allows inmates to work toward certification as grooms, a process which takes about six months. But because the average length of sentences at the prison is 10 months, most caretakers don't participate in it long enough to qualify. Only one has graduated to date, according to the sheriff's office.

Plymouth County Sheriff Joseph McDonald said he believes inmates benefit from work they do on the farm, just as they do from the other vocational programs.

"I think it's important that they get that sense of satisfaction from a job well done," he said. "They're up early in the morning, it's demanding, physical work, and they're coming back tired at the end of the day, but during that time they've cared for other lives that depend on



PHOTOS BY JOHN TILMACK/CLUBBER STAFF

At the Plymouth County Sheriff's Farm, inmate John Jancaitis (above) pets a horse called Energy. Below, Paul Qualter walks Sunshine. "I'd never really been around horses before," he says, "and now I know each one by their personality."

them."

For Suffolk Downs officials, the retirement program is dear to them and starts at the top with principal owner Richard Fields, who runs the Fields Family Foundation, which established the program. The Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation, which Suffolk supports with an annual contribution, pays for the day-to-day expenses of boarding the horses, estimated at \$2,500 to \$3,500 per horse per year. There is no county or state money involved.

Suffolk Downs made national news in 2008 when it became the first thoroughbred track in the nation to implement a strict no-slaughter policy for owners and trainers with horses stabled on its grounds. Since then, virtually every major racetrack in the

country has adopted a similar policy.

The track is also a longtime supporter of both the Thoroughbred Retirement and Canter New England programs, and at the end of each racing season hosts a "showcase" for Canter in the Suffolk Downs stable area to give people interested in purchasing a retired thoroughbred an opportunity to see a number of available horses in one place.

Chip Tuttle, chief operating officer at Suffolk Downs, recently adopted an 11-year-old horse named I Testify, a veteran of 126 racing starts, and has stabled him in Beverly; he says the horse eventually will be ridden by his wife and daughter.

"We try to make the retirement programs part of the culture of the track," said Tuttle dur-



ing a visit to the Plymouth farm.

Suffolk Downs' vice president of racing, Sam Elliott, has funded the retirement of several horses that competed at the facility, and racing analyst Jessica Paquette bought a former New England champion thoroughbred so she could retire him and use him as a pleasure horse.

But not every racehorse gets to retire to a farm, and not every animal at the Plymouth farm is expected to be adopted. There are some horses who because of injury or temperament aren't suitable for a second career; they will live out their lives on the farm doing what they were born to do — run, this time without a jockey on their backs.

Or, in some cases, striking up

unusual friendships with some of the other animals on the farm.

McDonald said that one of the latest thoroughbreds to arrive from Suffolk Downs, Tango Tony, quickly became infatuated with an alpaca that was a little lonely after its partner died. Tango Tony would not eat with the other horses and refused to leave the alpaca's side, and one night it broke through a fence to get close to the creature.

The alpaca is now kept at the farm's petting zoo with a new partner.

Said McDonald, "Tango Tony is taking the break-up one day at a time."

Rich Fahey can be reached at faheywrite@yahoo.com.