

SPURRING *the* EVOLUTION of EQUINE WELFARE:

In 1989, Maryland-based Kathy Schwartz-Howe and her then-husband, Allan Schwartz, took note of a young buckskin gelding named Toby while caring for their own horse at the barn where it was boarded. Toby's health was quickly declining and when the Schwartzes learned there weren't any state or local resources for owners in need, such as Toby's, they soon found themselves taking steps to acquire the gelding and rehabilitate him. Mrs. Schwartz-Howe bootstrapped her way through much of Toby's recovery and Maryland's legal system, though she credits local experts, welfare professionals and veterinarians for lending critical knowledge related to tending to the unique needs of horses recovering from neglect.

Toby's case was a success and it ignited a passion in the Schwartzes that led them to buy a small farm and offer intervention and rehabilitation services to horses in need. Bucking the statistic that 70% of horse rescues fail within the first three years, what began as a labor of love grew into a tiny nonprofit organization they called Days End Farm Horse

DAYS END FARM HORSE RESCUE

KARA PINATO SCRO
Jump Media

Rescue (DEFHR). Now, 31 years later, DEFHR, based in Woodbine, Maryland, is a successful 501(c)(3) equine welfare facility, sheltering up to 150 horses every year. Thanks to the support of loyal donors, local volunteers, dedicated staff and skilled trainers, DEFHR has rescued, rehabilitated

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and successfully re-homed more than 2,600 horses from across the country.

DEFHR is nationally known for its strong relationships with animal control and law enforcement authorities, as well as with humane agencies across the mid-Atlantic, and it's through these agencies that horses in need come to the facility. The organization provides intervention support services throughout Maryland and surrounding states, including as far away as Massachusetts and Florida. Because of the organization's deep expertise in equine rescue and its relationships with local and national authorities and agencies, DEFHR develops and hosts ongoing



Left Photo: Days End Farm Horse Rescue is known for its hands-on educational experiences for children and adults alike. Photo: Days End Farm Horse Rescue
Bottom Photo: Prince Ali, who enjoys competitive endurance riding with his adopter, Nicole, is one of many DEFHR alumni that have gone on to new riding careers. Photo: Nicole Wiley



educational programming to give investigators and animal control professionals the skills they need to successfully work on equine cases.

REHABILITATION TO SHOW-RING READY

Once horses are rehabilitated at DEFHR, the primary goal is to determine the best adoption scenario for each horse, whether that is to be adopted as a companion horse, or, if rideable, to determine which discipline or activity will enable the horse to thrive once adopted.

Head Trainer Sara Strauss and Assistant Trainer Leigha Schrader are responsible for working with and training rehabilitated horses and are involved in finding each horse the best match possible in an adopter.

"When horses are released from our rehabilitation program, they enter into a personalized training

"We always listen to the horse to help us determine what career(s) are best suited for them."

program where they are evaluated by either Sara or me," Schrader shared. "We always listen to the horse to help us determine what career(s) are best suited for them. While we go in different directions with individual horses, we also like to stay as diverse as possible with their training. We absolutely believe in cross training. Most horses that come through the DEFHR training program will have been ridden both English and Western, and they will dabble in a variety of disciplines. This helps prepare the horses for future careers and allows them to continue to grow under the care of our adopters."

While some horses adopted through DEFHR go on to be companion animals for humans or other

horses, due to physical or health-related matters that prevent them from being rideable, horses that are able to be ridden have taken in myriad careers, including everything from eventing to dressage, to trail and pleasure riding, and more.

"It is so common to think of rescues as 'just companion horses,'" said Schrader, "but the truth is, rescue horses can go on to successful careers in a variety of disciplines. For example, an adopter recently shared that she took her horse, Prince



Inspiration: *Spurring the Evolution of Equine Welfare: Days End Farm Horse Rescue*

Ali, to his first endurance competition at Fair Hill International. Another adopter has taken their pony, Nike, to show in the rated hunters in Virginia. DEFHR alumni are incredible!”

Much More Than a Rescue

Though DEFHR will always support equine rescue and rehabilitation, DEFHR is also dedicated to offering more comprehensive opportunities for learning and engaging with the natural world and how it ties back to horses and their future welfare. As a result, DEFHR has developed numerous programs designed to teach children and adults not only about horses, but about the environment more broadly and our role in protecting and preserving it. Over time, DEFHR’s educational offerings have grown more robust and diverse to encompass “humane and environmental education.” This idea holds that we can create a compassionate and caring society and end the

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cycle of violence and abuse by developing empathy, understanding, and respect for animals, people and the environment.

What makes DEFHR special and well-equipped to take on the role of educator is its unique ability and willingness to offer access to the general community. According to DEFHR CEO Erin Clemm Ochoa, the facility is an “entry point” that allows people as young as 5 years of age to visit DEFHR with nothing more than a general interest in horses, and ultimately, participate in a wide variety of relatively independent volunteer activities.



Days End Farm Horse Rescue is nationally recognized for its educational programming that gives investigators and animal control professionals the skills they need to successfully work on equine cases.
Photo: Days End Farm Horse Rescue

A Bright Future

It’s this kind of access that Ochoa wants DEFHR to capitalize on. She also stresses that DEFHR has reached a critical juncture in its growth and it is time to expand the organization’s critical care and rehabilitation capabilities and dive deeper into the education space. Through the purchase of an adjacent property, DEFHR is doing just that.

A building on the new property will allow for a larger classroom which will help expand the demographic that DEFHR reaches by accommodating partnerships with higher-education institutions, such as providing hands-on or situational learning for veterinary and law students. The lobby of the building will evolve into a welcome center where school groups and public tours will begin. Overall, the vision for the new property is akin to a state-of-the-art destination similar to an aquarium or science center that includes interactive, tactile displays that allow for an immersive, educational experience.

Ochoa also stresses that this expansion will help reach a broader network. “There’s a common misconception that we’re funded by state and federal governments,” stated Ochoa, “but that’s not the case. The services we provide law enforcement agencies are free of charge and we’re privately funded with grants making up just 10% of our budget. Now that we’re at this stage, I think we have a tremendous opportunity to continue on this education-focused trajectory and appeal to a wider audience of supporters.”

While Ochoa is focused on extending DEFHR’s reach, she is cognizant that the organization is only one part of the solution in advancing equine welfare. DEFHR’s strategic plan includes nurturing relationships with other nonprofit groups that share in their mission and will help to build awareness and contribute to the education of equine and environmental welfare.

“Our vision is lofty,” stated Ochoa. “However, I have no doubt that the future of equine welfare is evolving for the better and I’m so grateful that our organization can be an active participant in the solution.”