

Last Chance Ranch gives horses a second lease on life

Diana Tuorto

A dozen friendly horses immediately greet you, all with heads hung over stall doors, as you walk into the stable at Last Chance Ranch Equine Rescue. Several call out with boisterous whinnies, either for afternoon grain or attention from visitors.

Many of those voices would have been silenced at a slaughterhouse if Last Chance Ranch were not in existence today.

Lori Benzer officially started Last Chance Ranch Equine Rescue outside Quakertown, Pa., in 1998. The idea had been planted years earlier when Lori saved a 16.2-hand black gelding named Sinner, who had foundered and was bound for auction.

Knowing that many horses are sold off to meat buyers, Lori, then only 14, bought Sinner for meat price and watched him quickly recover.

"He came back one hundred percent," Lori said.

After Sinner's death in 1998, Lori began helping others find horses of their own. Since then, Last Chance Ranch has helped save hundreds of horses from abusive trainers, neglectful owners, and meat buyers at auction. Some of the horses are permanent residents of the ranch, while others are available for adoption to loving homes as either riding horses or companion pasture pets.

One recent rescue is a handsome 13-year-old pony named Jackson.

"We named him Jackson because we only paid twenty dollars for him," Lori said. "We found him at New Holland auction where he was hobbling around on three legs. He's still a little off, but he's almost sound and we're evaluating whether or not he'll be rideable."

"An invaluable part of Last Chance Ranch is the volunteers. We are always looking for more volunteers, children and experienced horsepeople especially."

For the kids, there's a group called the Junior Rescuers Club. "It's open to any kid, any age," Lori said. "Older children help teach the younger ones horsemanship."

Meetings are held at the farm the first Wednesday of every month from 6 to 8 p.m. The meetings include a demonstration with the horses. The group also meets two different Saturdays a month, the first to work with the horses around the barn, and the next to hold an off-site fund raiser.

"The kids come up with the fund raiser themselves and then do it," Lori said. "We split half the donations between the kids and the rescue."

While Last Chance Ranch has already helped countless horses, it continues to grow rap-

idly. "We're currently looking for land to build a rehabilitation and training center for the horses," Lori said. "We could use more business sponsors, and are also seeking a receptionist for our office. Volunteers with an interest in working with the horses, especially to help with morning feedings, would be extremely helpful too."

The rescue's next fund raiser will be a vendor fair at the farm September 25. "There will be a horse handling demonstration,

along with crafts, games, turtle races, and a lot more," added Lori. "Everyone should have a great time, and it benefits all our horses. We held a fund raiser at The Mansion Inn earlier this year, which included auctions of art, jewelry, and gift baskets from local merchants, and that was also very successful."

For information on Last Chance Ranch Equine Rescue, visit www.lastchanceranch.org or call 215-538-2510.



Bag has been a resident of the Last Chance Ranch for about a year. He is a sensitive horse seeking a patient owner whom he can really bond with.



Stanley Benzer, 8, works with Jackson, one of the newest rescues at Last Chance Ranch.