

Horse adoptions at Corvallis ranch are up, thanks to social media



JUNE 26, 2013 10:45 PM • [STORY AND PHOTOS BY STACIE DUCE FOR THE RAVALLI REPUBLIC](#)

CORVALLIS – Of the 15 horses under Shannon Alexander’s care on her ranch east of Corvallis, five have been adopted this spring.

“We’ve had huge adoption success,” she said. “It’s very exciting.”

The horses are beneficiaries of a rehabilitation program started by Western Montana Equine Rescue and Rehabilitation, a non-profit Bitterroot group that is funded through generous donations. Since January, a total of 24 horses have been in the group’s care at various locations and by the end of the May, eight now have permanent homes.

Incorporated in 2008 in response to the rising number of horses who needed intervention and horse owners who needed help as a result of the economic downturn, the group is simply an organized manifestation of the charity that has been ongoing among our local horse community.

“Many people have been doing what this organization does for a very long time,” she said. “Our success is just a sign of good people making a difference.”

From reduced farrier and veterinary rates to bookkeeping and graphic design of stationary, donated services come in addition to donations of hay, feed and cash. Many people with a variety of talents and resources are finding ways to help the horses in this organized foster care.

“We couldn’t do any of what we do without the help of other people,” Alexander said. “We have volunteers who come and groom the horses and clean the pens ... We have feed companies who donate regularly and families who sponsor a horse and his expenses every month. It’s wonderful.”

Recently, a host of volunteers improved the 10-stall horse barn on Alexander’s property with new flooring for the horses thanks to a generous supply of reduced-rate materials from Donaldson Brother’s sand and gravel in Hamilton.

In the last five years, the Western Montana Equine Rescue and Rehabilitation has helped more than 250 horses and donkeys in a variety of ways. Aside from the drastic measure of removing a

neglected horse from its home and providing rehabilitation, the group also offers counseling, advice and networking across the state of Montana and beyond to help horse owners overcome obstacles in caring adequately for their animals.

We've helped more than 40 horses find new homes while remaining with their owners until the adoption is complete which is ideal," Alexander said

For those horses requiring foster care, they receive a thorough evaluation that can take several months, "which helps tremendously in the horse being adopted by the right family," she said.

The rehabilitation includes a nutritional program, a mental evaluation and overcoming some serious instances of physical abuse or foundering.

"Sometimes it can be more than a year and a half before they're ready to be adopted," Alexander said.

In addition to the comprehensive evaluations, another factor has led directly to the increase in successful adoptions – social media.

Carole McLaughlin is another long-time member of the board of directors and manages the organization's website, blog and Facebook page. She said social media has been incredible in getting the word out about the mission and needs of the group as well as spotlighting the horses who are ready to adopt.

The group is especially grateful for the recent volunteer work of Debbie Hamilton who professionally photographed the horses "and really captured their personalities," Alexander said.

All private donations – from \$5 on up, Alexander said – are tax deductible and gratefully accepted. Monthly payments to sponsor the needs of an individual horse can be given through PayPal as well. Those interested in helping the horses can also donate quality furniture and household items to Fantastic Furnishings on Second Street in Hamilton which donates 100 percent of the proceeds on donated items as well as a percentage of sales on all other inventory to Western Montana Equine Rescue and Rehabilitation.

Both Alexander and McLaughlin have spent most of their lives loving, riding, training and transporting horses, they both say that they learn something new about horses every single day.

"No one will know everything they need to know about horses because not all situations are the same and each horse has a unique personality," Alexander said. "You have to listen to each horse, listen to what they tell you and not have your own agenda or you might find yourself disappointed."

McLaughlin added, "Most horse owners don't always know what they're getting into with the upkeep and cost of a horse especially with hoof care and getting their teeth checked annually."

So their priority is not only to compassionately save horses, but to help horse owners be good caregivers.

"You can't just turn your horse out on 10 acres of pasture and think that they'll do well," Alexander said. "We know most people have the horse's best interest at heart but they do need education to do it right."