

[Draft: Diana Pikulski]

Founded over two decades ago, the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation was established to provide meaningful retirement for thoroughbred horses no longer able to compete on the racetrack.

It is fact that until recently, a vast majority of the general public, and even many racing fans were, unaware of the sad fate that awaited thousands of Thoroughbreds each year. They assumed each animal was assured a safe and graceful retirement once its racing days were over.

Their perception of the "Sport of Kings" was one where great personal wealth and life-long benevolence to all horses were a given.

Unfortunately, it was a perception that did not accurately reflect reality.

Reality is a Thoroughbred industry made up largely of owners with only modest resources, owners who, no matter how responsible and well-intended, are barely capable of maintaining even a single Thoroughbred once it is unable to earn its keep on the track.

Reality is a world where horse meat is in demand in many foreign countries. Several slaughterhouses, now only in Canada and Mexico, are happy to create a supply.

That is a reality the TRF, and I can now say, the thoroughbred racing industry is determined to change.

The TRF was founded in 1982; two years later, it had its first retiree. His name was Promised Road, and he was typical of the type of horse that needs someone's help...and a caring home.

He was nine years old, an undistinguished campaigner whose career ended with a sixth-place finish in a \$3,500 claiming race.

There have been more than 3,000 Thoroughbreds more since him who have come under the care of the TRF. They include graded stakes winners and more than 30 who have earned more than \$750,000 in their lifetimes. Many of them started between 70 and 100 times in their careers.

Today, the TRF is the world's largest and best known charitable organization devoted to equine rescue.

The TRF is about more than helping horses in need. Early on, TRF Founder Monique Koehler negotiated a milestone agreement with the State of New York Department of Correctional Services. In exchange for land use and labor at the states Walkill Correctional Facility, the TRF would design, staff and maintain a vocational training program in equine care and management for inmates.

Upon the completion of their sentences, many former inmates who have worked with the horses have gone on to become productive, solid citizens and have been quick to give credit to the TRF program.

This unique prison program has been replicated at TRF farms in several other states, as this slide indicates.

SLIDE: located at the Blackburn Correctional Facility in Kentucky, the Marion County Correctional Facility in Florida, Putnamville Correctional Facility in Indiana, James River Work Center in Virginia, the Sykesville Correctional Center in Sykesville, MD, the Tulsa Boys Home in Tulsa OK, and the Wateree River Correctional Facility in South Carolina. We recently began construction of our newest facility in Plymouth, Mass.

A documentary film entitled “Homestretch” has been produced about the TRF vocational training program. It is showing on PBS stations across the country and copies can also be purchased at homestretchthemovie.com.

Here’s a brief clip from the documentary.

After film clip finishes:

While the TRF can point with pride to its many accomplishments over the years, the realization of the ultimate goal – providing every healthy thoroughbred racehorse a humane retirement -- is not yet complete.

The TRF must continue to grow and expand and establish new partnerships with its racing and breeding counterparts. At the same time, we must firmly establish the operating resources needed to ensure long-term continuity of care for our population of retired horses.

In the last 18 months, the tide has turned in our favor with a number of new programs to provide funding for TRF programs, including The Jockey Club Checkoff program and the recent funding commitment from NYRA, NYTHA and the NYRA-based jockeys.

For the TRF, this is the beginning of a new chapter the end of which will mark the time when the circle of stewardship over these wonderful athletes is complete.