

Auburn Journal

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Just longing to be put out to pasture

Horses' Honor rescue and sanctuary thanks its supporters with meet and greet

By: Paul Cambra, Features Editor



No horse left behind. That's Niña Thompson's credo. Fourteen years ago she founded Horses' Honor, a sanctuary for horses rescued from abuse, neglect or slaughter. For the past 10 years it has been an official 501c3 nonprofit. That may have changed their tax status, but that hasn't veered them off of their original goal of saving horses.

"There is an incredible need for horses floating around without a home," Thompson said. "It took years to build a base of support. We've rescued more than 500 horses. I adopt them out, find them homes. Our policy was any horse could return to Horses' Honor. I felt I wasn't taking full responsibility, so now it's for the duration of their life."

Thompson is opening the pasture gates to the community next weekend and giving people a chance to meet the horses and those behind Horses' Honor.

"Want to give a sense of thank you and gratitude to those that have gathered over the years to support these old horses and the notion that they have value," she said. "We are thankful to have a place for them to live out their lives in peace and comfort."

First and foremost on Thompson's thank you list is her husband, Eric Thompson, for giving them 83 acres in Lincoln to use. Between that and a 350-acre parcel they lease in Auburn, the horses have plenty of room to roam. Currently with 22 horses, she said they can accommodate 25.

"At one point we had 64 horses," she said. "It's a very difficult lesson, to learn to say no. It's the only reason we achieve this success. The phone rings every day with horses needing homes. I network, help people, very rarely I can take them."

Thompson estimated there are 100,000 horses

Horses' Honor Open house
 What: Refreshments, meet and greet
 Where: 6600 Garden Bar Road, Lincoln (see website for directions)
 When: 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 12
 Info: (916) 645-1630, horseshonor@gmail.com
 , horseshonor.org

Annual tack sale
 Where: Gold Country Fairgrounds, 1273 High St., Auburn
 When: Nov. 2 and 3
 Used tack can be dropped off at: Echo Valley Ranch in Auburn, Dave's Hay barn in Penryn, Ross Hay Ranch in Lincoln, Royal Oak Farm and Douglas Feed and Pet Supply in Granite Bay

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in the U.S. that lack homes. She said even sound, broke, trained, riding horses are hard to find homes for. And while Horses' Honor is a haven for older horses — a retirement pasture if you will — organizations such as the Shilo Foundation in Auburn fill a different need. "Niña specializes in senior horses. We take in pregnant mares and horses that need training," said Cheryl Rankin of the Shilo Foundation. She has a connection with a feed lot in Fallon, Nev., that ships horses to slaughter.

"If he doesn't think they should go to slaughter, he'll pull them," Rankin said. "Some he thinks are too young or a lot are moms and babies."

Rankin said it's common to see pregnant mares sold to slaughter because they weigh more. The meat is then shipped to Canada or Mexico for export to Europe.

At that point, Rankin has to raise the funds to buy them. Last summer she took in 13 orphaned foals. "Their moms were shipped to slaughter when they were two weeks old," she said. "They pushed them aside to load up the moms, so we go in and rescue the babies and bottle feed them."

Rankin said she boards horses to help pay for hay. She finds homes for as many as she can, but supply always seems to outweigh demand.

"Because of the economy people can't afford them," she said. "We rescued two shires because they didn't realize how much it would cost to feed them. There is a lot of that going on."

And feeding is just part of it. Horses require a lot of care, and rescue shelters rely on a network of volunteers to keep them running. Thompson said farrier care is donated, and horses receive regular veterinary care. Volunteers provide bookkeeping, technical and facility support. And she could always use help with grooming, pulling star thistle and — ahem — manure control.

"I've loved horses since I could speak," Thompson said. "My whole life was geared toward trying to be around horses. I would clean stalls to be around horses. I did all I could to be around them, to try to get the smell of horse on my finger."

The oldest horse residing at Horses' Honor is 39 years old. As it turns out, Grande Dame had been alone for 25 years.

"She was all skin and bones," Thompson said. "As she aged, she was no longer able to stand up and would prop herself up on the barbed wire. We have a photo of the very first time she touched noses with another horse, she was so glad to be in company." Thompson said they see a lot of starvation cases and it is satisfying to see them gain weight. Even more satisfying is watching them interact with one another.

"They derive great comfort in their companionship," she said. "A horse alone is a horse ill at ease. They were designed to be in a herd. They generally have a pecking order to work out who is boss. There are more dominant individuals, like an office full of people. They can develop deep and meaningful friendships with each other."

None of the rescue horses are ridden. All of them are retired, living life out in equine paradise. To keep this slice of horse heaven intact, a used tack sale will take place at the Gold Country Fairgrounds the first weekend in November. Thousands of items will be available, all donated. Used tack can be dropped off at Echo Valley Ranch in Auburn; Dave's Hay Barn in Penryn; Ross Hay Ranch in Lincoln and Royal Oak Farm and Douglas Feed and Pet Supply in Granite Bay. Even the tiniest donation is welcomed. There are 22 horses — and counting — that rely on the generosity and caring hearts of humans.

"I love them all but some definitely have touched my heart deeply," Thompson said. "I can't even describe some of the relationships I have had. This is bigger than the sum of its parts. It's my life's work."

Keywords:

[horses' honor](#) [Niña Thompson](#) [Eric Thompson](#) [cheryl rankin](#) [Shilo Foundation](#)

