

## **Good Will Hunter and Hunters Circle 2009 Case History**

On April 3<sup>rd</sup> I received a telephone call, requesting assistance with transport for 2 horses being kept at Centerbrook Farm in Climax, NY.

Not sure about the situation and not wanting to hinder any possible investigation, I reached out to the NYS Police. The Trooper who returned my call assured me that there was no current investigation and that although some of the horses **may** have needed grooming, it wasn't that bad on the farm.

I travelled out to Centerbrook Farm the next morning. Upon arrival I called the owner to tell her that from roadside, the place looked decent and the horses appeared in good condition. I thought she might want to reconsider her decision to move the horses. I was then advised that what I was looking at was not Centerbrook Farm, and that I needed to take the private road through this first farm, over a bridge and through a gate. Once I proceeded through the gate, the conditions changed. You could see knotted manes, some sharp angulated hindquarters in the fields and an overall less than ideal situation. As I pulled up to the barn, I watched workers on a tractor chasing a group of young horses.

I was greeted by a farm manager and asked to wait while they caught "the foal". A short while later, I was presented a lethargic and shaggy little colt who looked like a weanling. While looking over the colt, workers pointed out wounds to his front legs, so I took pictures to document his condition. When asked how old the colt was, workers said he was a yearling. I requested medical records and a coggins test and was told there were none. Four men then placed the colt on to my trailer, because he could not walk on his own.

The owner was called, my concerns were expressed and I received permission to call for veterinary and police assistance. I placed calls to the NYS Police and local veterinarians. The trooper assigned to the Coxsackie area had just made an arrest that needed processing, so no help was forthcoming. The local veterinarians were unable to come out to the farm.

I then asked to see the mare, and was led in to a barn and down an aisle, where stall after stall was filled with skinny mares. The stalls were not bedded and the horses stood in their own urine and manure. The mare I was to pick up, Hunters Circle, was in the next to last stall on the right. She was terribly skinny, with a severe lice infestation and a very poor coat. I asked them to stop brushing her because all they were doing was pulling her hair out.

The men loaded Hunters Circle on to my trailer, I once again reported conditions to the owner and then did the only thing I could do, I drove the mare and the colt to the local state police barracks. The horses left behind needed help. I filed a complaint, consulted with the SPCA from the barracks and then left to get the horse's medical care.

The owner agreed to sign over the horses to Equine Rescue Resource Inc. so that they could receive the care they needed, after she indicated she was not prepared or in a position to take in such debilitated horses. Emergency medical care and shelter was arranged enroute back to Orange County. Spirit Horse Farm offered box stalls to the horses and Dr. Linda Kutrubes put aside her evening's plans to meet me at the farm.

The vet and the volunteers all remarked at how cooperative and good natured the colt was. The

mare was grateful for the hay provided and couldn't care less what we did with her, so long as she could eat through it. When it came time to write up a bill, the colt needed a name. I thought "Good Will" because of his good nature, and then added "Hunter" as a reference to his dam.

The horses were cared for and monitored daily by a team of volunteers and our veterinarian. They were carefully fed, deloused and dewormed. The colt was not responding as well as his dam, and when blood work came back, we realized he needed more help than we could give on the farm. He was immediately trucked up to Cornell University on April 8<sup>th</sup> and admitted to the Equine Hospital.

At Cornell, Will weighed in at 364 pounds, approximately half of what a normal healthy one year old thoroughbred colt should weigh. He had an uncomfortable hind limb lameness that caused him to lay down a lot, his appetite was poor, he was very thin, his lice infestation was significant, rain rot was found all through his top line and his growth was stunted. He remained in the hospital for 11 days, during which he had small frequent meals, extra heavy bedding to make him comfortable and the nicest alfalfa hay you have ever seen. We were prepared to put the colt down if the medical team felt he would have a poor quality of life, or be in pain. They made no promises, but did their best and on April 18<sup>th</sup> he was cleared for discharge, so long as he would be monitored and returned for follow up.

As I trucked up to Cornell, I made a stop in Binghamton to check in with the NYS Horse Council, as they were having their **April** meeting at the CCE office. Considering the circumstances, the board of directors were kind enough to allow me to report on the Humane Committee early. What followed was not anticipated or expected... as I was ready to leave for Cornell, Chip Watson stopped me and addressed the council and explained expenses involved with humane law enforcement and rescue and the need for funding in cases such as this. I was asked a few questions, and then without hesitation, the NYS Horse Council wrote a \$500 check payable to Cornell University to help offset the medical expenses of Good Will Hunter. Further, individual members stepped forward with donations to take along to help defray the costs. Their generosity was heartfelt and overwhelming.

Upon arrival at Cornell, I was presented with a much brighter little colt, who had the energy to whinny! Discharge orders were reviewed and Will was loaded on to the trailer, with a supply of the alfalfa hay he had grown fond of while there.

On the way back to Orange County, I received a call from Shannon Budnik, saying the meeting was ongoing, and that I was welcome to stop in to rest the colt. Once there, the board members, one by one, started to sneak out of the meeting to see Will, and buckets of water were brought out to him. Shortly thereafter, George King had to break up the meeting so everyone could go out to the parking lot. Shannon Budnik and Chip Watson were kind enough to escort the horse trailer back to the Orange County area, where volunteers were waiting to follow Will down to his new foster home in Warwick, NY. We arrived at the farm where a group of people were waiting to meet Will and welcome him to their home.

Will settled in well, and enjoyed the weeks of pampering and good food 4 times a day. Although his turnout was limited, he maintained his wonderful disposition and was agreeable to the various vet appointments and attentions. During this time, he was provided Cosequin, Adequan, Vitamin E and then Phenylbutazone as needed.

On June 11<sup>th</sup>, Good Will Hunter returned to Cornell for a re-evaluation. He weighed in at 530 pounds, his coat shined and he walked in well on a lead line. Although still lame in the hind right

leg, improvement was seen there as well. Through a series of evaluations and testing, the cause of lameness was found to be trauma to the synovial membrane, than encapsulates the stifle joint. This membrane, responsible for lubricating the joint, was found to be thickened, possibly from trauma sustained while at the Climax farm. The surgeons, lameness specialists and veterinarian overseeing the case agreed, give Will more time. It's possible that he will continue to improve, and that he will become more comfortable, and if the stifle improves, then there may be surgery to straighten his leg so he can be serviceable sound and have a brighter future. While there, he was also castrated in the hopes of maintaining his lovely disposition, and in an effort to slow down his growth, so that his body size would not compromise his small legs.

Will continued to grow, develop and improve in foster care.

### **Cruelty Enforcement**

On April 4 th , the first two horses, Good Will Hunter and Hunters Circle, were removed from Centerbrook Farm and a formal complaint was filed with the NYS Police.

On April 8 th , the New York State Police, accompanied by the Columbia Greene County SPCA, executed a search and seizure warrant at Centerbrook Farm. Evidence of violations to the NYS Agriculture and Markets Laws, Article 26, Section 353 was found. 177 horses were seized, 77 of which were voluntarily surrendered to the Columbia Greene SPCA.

On April 10 th , Ernest Paragallo was arrested by the NYS Police and charged with 22 misdemeanor counts of animal cruelty.

On July 17 th , True Quality scratched out of Grade III Jaipur Stakes because of "insufficient proof" that Paragallo's Paraneck Stable no longer had ownership interest in the colt, per the NYS Racing and Wagering Board.

On August 5 th , District Attorney Terry Wilhelm called upon various witnesses to testify before a grand jury in Greene County Court. The grand jury then indicted Ernest Paragallo on 35 counts of animal cruelty, 13 more than he had been originally arrested and charged with on April 10, 2009. The additional charges were to include Good Will Hunter, his dam Hunters Circle, 2 horses euthanized prior to the search and seizure, 2 horses deprived of necessary care after the search and seizure and 7 horses purchased from what was described as a slaughter pen in Bainbridge, New York.

At this time, additional horses have been surrendered to the SPCA and the criminal case is working its way through the court system. If convicted, Paragallo will face two years in jail and \$35,000 in fines.

I applaud Greene County District Attorney Terry Wilhelm. Misdemeanor charges are not normally presented to a grand jury for indictment, but the prosecutors decided to seek an indictment so that Paragallo's case would be moved to superior court, instead of the local justice court. Per Wilhelm, "It was our opinion that the proper venue was county court because of the seriousness of the charges and the likelihood that this will lead to litigation".

If Paragallo is convicted on any of the 35 animal cruelty charges, it is unlikely that any U.S. racing jurisdiction would issue him a license, and The Jockey Club could deny Paragallo his registry privileges.

**Kudos to The New York State Thoroughbred Breeding and Development Fund. On August 20 th the fund agreed to set new standards for breeding fund awards that will disqualify any breeder implicated in horse abuse or neglect. Under the new policy, breeding fund money for anyone charged in a case of horse neglect would be frozen. If the charge leads to a criminal conviction, the breeder would be disqualified from the awards program. (Paragallo has earned more than \$600,000 in breeding awards over the last 10 years, so this could prove to be a significant consequence.) The fund has also mentioned an effort to improve its inspections of farms in New York state to prevent another case such as Paragallo's.**

### **In Conclusion**

**The thoroughbred racing industry is taking this case very seriously, which is tremendous. We are waiting for the criminal case against Ernest Paragallo to work its way through the Greene County Court System. Equine Rescue Resource Inc. recently adopted both Good Will Hunter and Hunters Circle in to new homes. Both horses have recovered a great deal and have moved on in life, in homes that love them very much.**

**For more information or to show your support of humane efforts in the equine industry:**

**The Honorable Terry Wilhelm  
Greene County District Attorney  
411 Main Street  
Catskill, NY 12414**

**New York State Police  
Troop F  
78R McLaren Road Extension  
South Cairo, NY 12482**

**Equine Rescue Resource Inc.  
PO Box 17  
Pine Bush, NY 12566  
[\(845\) 744-1728.](tel:8457441728)**

**Columbia Green Humane Society  
125 Humane Society Road  
Hudson, NY 12534  
[\(518\) 828-6044](tel:5188286044)**