

Beauty's Haven Rescues and Rehabilitates Abused Horses

By Celeste Rubanick

Dr. Michael Porter, a veterinarian in Alachua, doesn't hesitate when he's asked his opinion about the best non-profit horse rescue in this area.

"I cover a big part of the state and part of Georgia," he said, "from southern Georgia down to Melbourne and Venice, and Beauty's Haven is the only rescue I associate myself with both publicly and privately. They do the best job in the state."

Although Beauty's Haven Farm and Equine Rescue is located in Morriston, about five miles south of Williston, many of its residents, volunteers and veterinary personnel come from western Alachua County. Opened in 2006 by Theresa and Robert Batchelor, it has become the "go to" facility for Alachua County when farm animals are found neglected or abused.

But Beauty's Haven story starts before that.

Back surgery in 1997 had left Theresa partially disabled, and she retired from her government job in 2000. Soon afterward, her two children started horseback riding lessons and Theresa discovered that riding helped her pain. An Arabian horse named Beauty was seized by Pasco County a short time later. She had been beaten and neglected and the Batchelors leased five acres outside Tampa (where they lived) to care for her. When Theresa spent time with Beauty, both of them felt better. The family relocated to Levy County.

In 2013, a man called the rescue from Alachua and said he had a pony who was down and he couldn't afford to have a vet euthanize her. The pony was the subject of an active Alachua County neglect case but nothing had been done.

"I first examined Betsy Rose in June 2013," remembered Dr. Natalie Lambeck of High



Photos provided to The Observer

Betsy Rose arrives at Beauty's Haven in June 2013, so neglected by her owner that she couldn't stand.

Springs. "She was being surrendered to Beauty's Haven and she was emaciated and weak. They did an excellent job providing her the proper nutrition and nursing care, even slinging her during the early stages of her rehabilitation, in order to allow her to gain her muscle strength back so she could eventually stand on her own."

Theresa appealed to her "village," as she calls the thousands of Facebook followers who support the rescue, and enough money was pledged to try to save the pony. Betsy Rose couldn't even eat grain because her back teeth were growing into her gums. One by one, her problems were addressed, she spent less and less time in the sling, and now Betsy Rose, a happy pony, is the rescue's "poster child." People all over the world have met her through Facebook, and send gifts.

"When you surround yourself with good people,"

Theresa commented, "good things happen."

Elizabeth Fried of Archer is the treasurer of the non-profit and also a volunteer. "When Betsy Rose got there," she said, "I thought it would be a miracle if she lived. But that's what happens at Beauty's Haven – miracles."

Fried and her daughter, Brianna, both volunteer at the rescue and know first hand how much work is involved with caring for 30 or more horses, mules and donkeys.

"It's really hard work," she said. "I'm constantly amazed at the dedication of Theresa and Bob. They do it all if there are no volunteers that day, and that happens more than we like."

"I have a lot of trust in Theresa and her husband," Porter continued. "They do exactly what they say they're going to do with their resources. A few bad rescues have put a bad taste in people's mouths. See Beauty's Haven, next page

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Dr. Michael Porter and Theresa Batchelor examine Betsy Rose a few weeks after her arrival.



After weeks of being assisted by the sling, Betsy Rose and a friend are able to enjoy pasture time.

mouths, but Beauty's Haven delivers."

Porter went on to mention that he was recently contacted by a Tampa Bay horse owner who needed help with a starving mare. He called Theresa, she appealed to her Facebook followers, and the mare, recently renamed "Zahara," is now getting better at the rescue.

"People see free horses on Craigslist all the time," Theresa explained, "and these

people take a free horse and have no idea what to do or how much work it is. I get lots of calls from people like that. And too often those horses end up going into the slaughter pipeline."

Volunteering at Beauty's Haven is actually a great way to learn what horse ownership entails. Veterinary students from UF, kids who want to be vets, and people who simply love animals perform volunteer work at the rescue, feed-

ing cleaning and loving the animals, who thrive on all the attention. Theresa urges others to come learn what it takes to care for a horse properly by volunteering. She also tries to educate the public to call the right agency when neglect or cruelty is witnessed.

"There are so many more things we'd like to do if we just had the time," she said. "For example, I would like to have a gelding clinic so that

See Beauty's Haven, next page



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people with stallions who can't afford to have them gelded could take advantage of a cheaper price during a clinic."

Beauty's Haven has rehabilitated and placed nearly 300 horses, donkeys, and mules in its nine year existence and has won several non-profit awards. Locally, they've won Sun State Credit Union's Non-Profit of the Month award three times. And they're currently in the running for a national award called the Shelter Challenge. The rescue's Facebook page is "liked" by 4,975.

Lamneck added, "All the animal rescues, including Beauty's Haven, serve a wonderful and compassionate need in our community by helping these animals, like Betsy Rose, come back from death's door and enjoy a second chance at life."

To learn more about Beauty's Haven, apply to volunteer or adopt, or donate money, visit their Facebook page or website, www.bhfer.org. If you would like to visit the facility, call 352-258-9309.

(There is some confusion about the difference between Mill Creek Farm in Alachua and Beauty's Haven Rescue in Morriston. Mill Creek is a retirement home for horses. According to their website, Mill Creek's mission is to provide lifetime care to horses seized by law enforcement agencies, rescued by the SPCA or humane societies, horses retired from government service, and unwanted horses that are destined for slaughter. They do not accept horses from private owners, and the horses are never ridden again. On the other hand, Beauty's Haven rescues farm animals that have been abused and/or neglected, and adopt them out when they have been rehabilitated. They are as young as two weeks old, often from private owners, and most of the horses



This was Dr. Porter's first look at Zahara in the Tampa Bay area. Within hours, enough money was donated to bring her to Beauty's Haven for rehabilitation.



Everyone associated with Beauty's Haven is looking forward to the beautiful Zahara gaining several hundred pounds.

can be ridden. It is always the goal of Beauty's Haven to adopt out healthy animals so more can be saved and rehabilitated.)

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