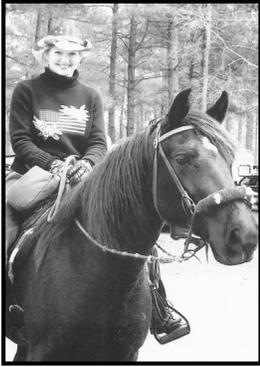


LET ME SAY THIS ... ABOUT THAT

By Patty Livingston, President



There was a news report on TV recently that showed extremely emaciated horses being picked up by the Department of Agriculture's Equine Division. They picked up eleven horses and brought them back to one of their four impounds. It was one of the first legal im-

poundments that the State has done in a few years. Most of the time they don't have to go that route because the problem is so rampant with unwanted horses that most neglectors sign them over to the state or county, hoping to avoid prosecution.

With over ten million horses in this country today, things have to be done differently than in the past. The GDA must be able to sell the horses they impound within 3 or 4 months, or as soon as they are rehabilitated. We already know that if it doesn't ride, it doesn't sell. GERL is paying the majority of the costs for all of the horses impounded by the GDA today. What would we do if they started swooping in and picking up large numbers of skinny horses and taking them back to the state impounds to vet and feed as so many people think they should? We do not have unlimited funds to provide to them to take care of excessive numbers of horses. The eleven horses that were impounded recently will cost an estimated \$6500 to rehabilitate. That includes feed, hay and vet care for four months. Think about what a herd of twenty or more could cost. It's scary.

It is imperative that negligent horse owners are made to take care of their horses instead of the government or rescues doing it for them. The state has inspectors who can check on the condition of skinny horses to make sure that the owner is complying. They are very responsive and can usually check on the condition of a horse within two or three days after being reported. The public can help keep an eye on horses in their communities,

too. Sometimes the offender will start feeding his horses because he knows he's being watched and will get reported if he doesn't. Once a dead beat owner figures out that they are going to have to feed their horses or go to jail, many times they will let a concerned inquirer take the horse(s) off of their hands. It never ceases to amaze me how many people step up to take a poor horse from somebody who isn't taking care of it properly. God bless the folks out there who do that so willingly and so often. They are part of the solution, however small.

This is how things need to work with the overwhelming number of neglected horses there are today. And, especially with equine owners who have large herds that cannot or will not feed them regularly. We must be the eyes and ears for these poor creatures that are unlucky enough to be owned by such a person and impoundment by the state and counties should be the last resort and performed only when an owner is non-compliant and the horse(s) are in eminent danger.

And, let me say this about that...WE need to be the ones to help communicate this message to the public and especially those who bash the GDA equine program. They are doing exactly what needs to be done...educating and making people accountable. The GDA equine program is a very important component of our "Equine Get Well Plan" and we need to ensure that it stays in place by supporting it! Georgia is one of few states who have equine inspectors and vehicles with which to operate. I am proud of the work that they do and GERL is proud to support them. Also, they are our partner with the training of law enforcement and animal control officers all over Georgia. We are seeing a difference in what is happening out in the field. More and more counties are starting to get a little more involved and a little tougher about prosecuting people who starve horses. It is very exciting to witness the progress we've seen in just the past four years. Of course, there's still a long way to go. My prediction...fasten your chin straps and get ready to witness more attention on animal abusers and neglectors in the future!