

Racing toward retirement

Sykesville farm provides post-career options for thoroughbreds

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By Charles Schelle

cschelle@patuxent.com

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Just like many Americans, race horses also have uncertain retirement plans.

"There are thousands of horses that come off the race tracks across the United States that still (lack) a plan in place for retirement," said Diana Pikulski, executive director of the nonprofit Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation.

Second Chances Farm in Sykesville aims to help provide a place and a plan for horses instead of sending horses to livestock auctions that might have once raced in the Preakness.

The farm on Slacks Road is partnership between the state controlled Central Maryland Correctional Facility in Sykesville (formerly Central Laundry Facility) and the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation of Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

Officials cut the ribbon to officially open the farm on Thursday, May 14.

Inmates will work with abused, neglected and retired race horses to both provide some positive retirement activities for the horses, and for inmates to learn both a new skill and some sensitivity training.

The Sykesville farm is the first of its kind in Maryland, though the foundation is looking at Hagerstown and the Eastern Shore for its next locations in the state, Pikulski said.

"We're hoping to have more than one facility here in Maryland, which is wonderful because it's a great horse racing state and a great place to turn out horses to graze," she said.

The program isn't unfamiliar with Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services Sec. Gary Maynard. He helped South Carolina and other states start programs at state prisons.

The farm operation is covered by the foundation. The barn's renovations cost about \$30,000 and

have been funded through fundraising and the foundation.

It costs \$3 to \$4 to shelter and take care of one horse each day.

The foundation is continuing to solicit donations to fence in more of the 80 acres of pastoral property.

"There are very little tax dollars that go into this program, and it will continue to be funded by the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation," Maynard said.

The president of the Maryland Horse Breeders Association said his organization wants to be responsible for the horses they breed.

"There's a lot of horses through their racing career don't come out as pristine as they went in, and there needs to be a place for these horses to come, and this is one of those places," said James Steele, association president and general manager of Shamrock Farms in Woodbine.

The farm has three horses for now — named Greek, Quinn and Stevey (which are not their racing names). The horses come from existing farms operated by the foundation. Officials expect to increase the number of horses.

Horses at the farm may ultimately be adopted or be trained for uses ranging from equestrian, casual riding, polo, police honor guards and more, officials said.

About 10 to 15 inmates will work on the farm. Inmates will learn to groom and care for the horses, officials said.

Already, inmates have helped install fences, electrical wiring and renovated the barn.

The barn was part of the Springfield Hospital Center when in 1898, Gov. Frank Brown, a native of Sykesville, sold the land that he owned to the state.

It was also used for a while by the University of Maryland livestock research program through the 1980s before the state reacquired the land for the Maryland Police Training Commission's driving course, Maynard said.

The property also has another program in place.

The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services are also working with the Department of

Environment and Chesapeake Bay Wildlife heritage to preserve and improve the land and a branch of Piney Run that meanders through the farm, Maynard said.

WANT TO HELP?

The nonprofit Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation is seeking partners for the new Second Chances Farm in Sykesville. Partners can be people involved in racing, horse farms and rescues, as well as people interested in adoption or sponsoring a horse.

The foundation is also has sponsorship opportunities where sponsors can provide funds for stalls, paddock, run-in sheds, fencing and more. The sponsorships range from \$500 to \$10,000. General donations are accepted in any amount.

Call 518-226-0028 or e-mail Diana Pikulski, executive director, at Diana@trfinc.org