

# georgetown view

MAY 2019



## BLUEBONNET EQUINE

RESCUING ONE HORSE AT A TIME

WW MEMORIAL  
IT'S HISTORY

LARK & OWL  
GEORGETOWN'S  
INDEPENDENT  
BOOKSELLER

FOOD  
SWEETNESS OF  
BLUEBERRIES

People often seem to live in a continual state of flux, changing jobs, homes, states, and social circles, but when we look back on the past, there's usually one thing that stayed constant. It could be a loved one, a favorite item, or even a hobby. For Amber Karkowksi, it's her love of horses that has stayed with her since childhood—and it's volunteering with the Marchman Equine Humane Society (MHS) that makes her need to help them.

Danica, a sweet six-year-old Appaloosa, came into Amber's life when she was eight. She learned to ride on Danica and competed with her in all-horsemanship events during junior high school and high school with her. When Amber joined the West Point equestrian team in college, she learned to ride English-style, beginning with walk-trot and working up to jumping. And though the teams ride heavily donated horses, all required their riders to help them learn to be riders instead of scared, "working with a different horse at each practice and in competition forced Amber into a sharper rider," she says. "Because every horse is different. At competitions, you draw a horse out of a hat, and that's the horse you ride. You don't know what you're in for."

Amber later joined the military and after returning from her second tour of Iraq in 2011, she took in Lala, an uncontracted thoroughbred in need of a home. "She'd moved on the farmage track in Florida but ended up at this place where they weren't feeding her," she says, remembering it took about six months to get Lala healthy enough to safely ride her. And over time, Amber trained Lala to pull a cart and be ridden in both English and Western style.

The desire to help horses didn't end with Lala. Amber recalled a friend that brought horses from slaughter sales in an attempt to rescue them. "We realized that her friend's money was permitting bill buyers to buy more horses, ultimately doing nothing to end the cycle. That's where Amber's story began with MHS. "Through research," Amber

says, "I found Marchman and learned they take horses directly from law enforcement—before the horse ends up at a slaughter sale."

For their website, MHS works "to improve the lives of equines by educating and helping owners, assisting law enforcement agencies, rehabilitating abused and neglected equines, and placing them into safe, permanent homes."

Amber began volunteering her time and her horse, putting her knowledge and experience to use assessing the condition of horses seized by law enforcement. She's also fostering these horses. "I don't foster every horse that comes to me," she says, "but I do evaluate each to determine what level of foster home the horse is appropriate for." ■



Since its inception in February 2005, BEHS has rescued 1,017 equines across Texas and adopted out 800. The horses primarily come from law enforcement seizures, though BEHS will accept previously adopted horses, too. Currently, 75 horses reside with fosters, and law enforcement has asked BEHS to take in at least five more. Unfortunately, there's a foster home shortage. "We need places for these horses to go. I can only take in so many," Amber laments, noting that BEHS needs volunteers to work events as well.

BEHS doesn't have many requirements for those wanting to foster a horse, just a commitment to feeding the horse, keeping its feet trimmed, and ensuring it receives necessary veterinary care. Homes with around three or more acres, horse-safe fencing, and some form of shelter to get horses out of the elements are ideal. The rescue provides a monthly stipend to help cover feed and reimburses foster homes for farrier and veterinary care. "You may have to pay a little bit depending on the quality of feed you're feeding them," Amber admits, "but it's usually not anything that becomes a financial hardship."

Because most rescued horses were starved by their former owners,

they're usually sent to foster homes and placed on a feeding program. Amber says that it can take anywhere from three months to a year before they're healthy enough to undergo training. "We want every horse we adopt out under saddle if possible because if they're broke to ride, it significantly decreases the chance they'll end up at a slaughter sale later," she explains.

BEHS sends trainers out to foster homes but also encourages training via a biannual training challenge. A foster horse is sent to work with an amateur or professional trainer for three months preceding the competition held each May and October. While amateurs participate as a hobby, professionals could win up to \$7,500. The challenge also serves to increase adoptions. "At the training challenge in October 2018, we had around 50 horses compete, and 60 were adopted at the event," Amber says. "The more horses we get adopted, the more horses we can take in. I want to see all of them go to good homes and be well taken care of." ■

Bluebonnet Equine Humane Society seeks to find safe homes for rescued horses. To donate time, money, or volunteer, visit [bluebonnetequine.org](http://bluebonnetequine.org). To report suspected abuse, visit [wilco.org/Elected-Officials/Sheriffs-Old-Law-Enforcement/Animal-Control-Livestock](http://wilco.org/Elected-Officials/Sheriffs-Old-Law-Enforcement/Animal-Control-Livestock).

