

Abandoned Henry County horse to take part in 2016 Rescue Challenge

McDONOUGH — When Orion was picked up by Henry County Animal Care and Control in March, the horse was a mess. The eight-year-old Palomino had not been cared for — he was malnourished, filthy and left uncastrated. Orion is what Gerri Yoder calls a “throwaway horse.”

The Animal Control director said that horses can be “extremely expensive to take care of,” and when some owners get into trouble financially, they tend to turn the animals loose.



“The newness wears off or they can’t afford basic care anymore and people just move away and they leave the animal to fend for themselves,” Yoder said. “The problem with horse ownership is it’s easy to get into, but not easy to get out of.” However, no matter the difficulties when looking to relocate a horse, or any animal for that matter, it’s on the owner to find a new home. “It’s not the taxpayers’ responsibility,” Yoder said. “And no animal should ever be abandoned.” In Orion’s case, he was one of the lucky ones. He was given the necessary medical care needed and gelded to make him less aggressive. Working closely with the Georgia Equine Rescue League, Yoder and GERL were able to secure a foster home for Orion to continue his recovery.

GERL is a nonprofit organization “that believes it is the responsibility of its members to help find solutions to the growing problem of starved, abused and neglected equine in the state of Georgia,” the group’s website states.

The nonprofit group works with the Georgia Department of Agriculture and law enforcement to “ensure widespread enforcement of equine protection laws.”

Orion is recovering so well that he has been chosen by GERL to take part in the 2016 Rescue Challenge. The challenge pairs the state’s top trainers with rescued horses to teach them basic skills, with the hopes of finding them a permanent home — all in a span of three months. The winning horse will earn its trainer the title of Top Trainer for 2016 at GERL.

“We take virtually untouched horses that have been seized because of abuse, neglect or abandoned,” said GERL Horse Trainer Amy Scruggs. Scruggs has been teamed up with Orion for the challenge. “I haven’t met him yet, but his foster parents say he’s doing great,” she said. “They’ve even been able to work with him. He’s now used to being touched all over.” Scruggs has horses of her own and has been training for 20 years. She said Orion was a “wild man” when he arrived at the foster home in north Georgia, partially due to not being gelded for so long. Scruggs said he’s had no training and carries a large scar on his right side, which speaks to the possible conditions he was living in before being rescued. Scruggs said she’ll need all 120 days to train Orion. “The first few weeks we’ll spend getting to know each other and establish trust,” she said. “After that we’ll get used to going on walks, having his ears touched, learn to stand still and cross tied, and having his hair clipped and hooves trimmed.”

She said it’s essential to move slowly when training a horse because “if you push too hard too fast, they’ll become unresponsive. “They are gentle, sensitive creatures, and all they want to do is please you and make you happy,” Scruggs said. “But you can’t put too much on them all at once.” Scruggs is an English rider and plans to teach Orion the English discipline. She said she’ll be “tickled” if they can get Orion to the point where he’s walking, trotting and cantering. “I want to make sure I can help to get him a home where he’ll be loved and pampered,” Scruggs said. She said despite their beginnings, all rescued horses have value. “These are wonderful animals who just need a home,” she said. “No matter where they started, they’re worthy of having a good life.”

Scruggs’ advice to those looking to adopt a horse includes visiting a reputable barn, taking riding lessons and learning everything that goes into taking care of a horse — before bringing it home. “Make sure you’re adopting the right horse for your skill level and lifestyle,” she said. To follow Scruggs’ and Orion’s progress, visit www.scruggshunters.blogspot.com. To learn more about GERL, visit: www.gerltd.org.

The Rescue Challenge is Sept. 24 at the UGA Livestock Arena, 2598 S. Milledge Ave. in Athens. Participating horses will be available for adoption, but only to pre-approved adopters.

