

A place for the horses

BY ANNA B. MITCHELL

staff writer

With feed costs reaching all time highs, drought withering pastures and demand for horses dwindling, Wayne Griffis said he is seeing some of the lowest prices in a generation for horses.

"If you had a pasture and a sign saying 'Will Take Your Free Horse,' you about would need somebody to direct traffic," said the owner of Griff's Farm and Home Center in Pendleton.

Horses that sold for \$1,000 three years ago, he said, can't be given away.

Leslee Hiller, owner of the Pendleton horse shop Tack-A-Tack, said she's found new homes for three horses in the past year when customers came in wanting to give them away.

"If they are not using the horse, they can't justify the money that the horse costs," she said.

Vet bills, fitting horseshoes or clipping hooves, plus the cost of feed amounts to more than \$2,000 a year.

Meanwhile, owners who at one time could count on selling their horses for a minimum of \$400 to slaughterhouses that export horse meat have seen that market disintegrate, too, Griffis said. The last kill houses in the United States shut down within the past year and fuel costs to export horses to slaughterhouses in Canada and Mexico are cost prohibitive. At the same time euthanizing a horse costs about \$250, he said.

"People who could barely afford to keep horses before are having it tough," Griffis said.

Over the past 12 months, members of the Anderson-based Palmetto Equine Awareness and Rescue League have responded weekly, sometimes daily, to calls about starving and neglected horses, said the organization's president, Nicole Walukewicz.

She anticipates that number will grow as the cost of keeping horses rises. With that in mind, she has alerted the Anderson County Environmental Services Division that it ought to consider building a facility to house horses whose owners face criminal charges for neglect. She has submitted a plan that would cost



STARVING MARE: Chloe was seized this past May from a down-on-it's-luck equine rescue organization in Abbeville County.

less than \$100,000 of the division's \$3.2 million budget to build a shelter on 12 acres on U.S. 29 South.

Because neglecting farm animals is a state offense, sheriff's deputies (not animal control officers) respond, said sheriff's Capt. Tim Jones, head of the patrol division.

"We are strapped with enforcing this," Jones said. "But it's just as important handling these situations as speeding or any traffic violation."

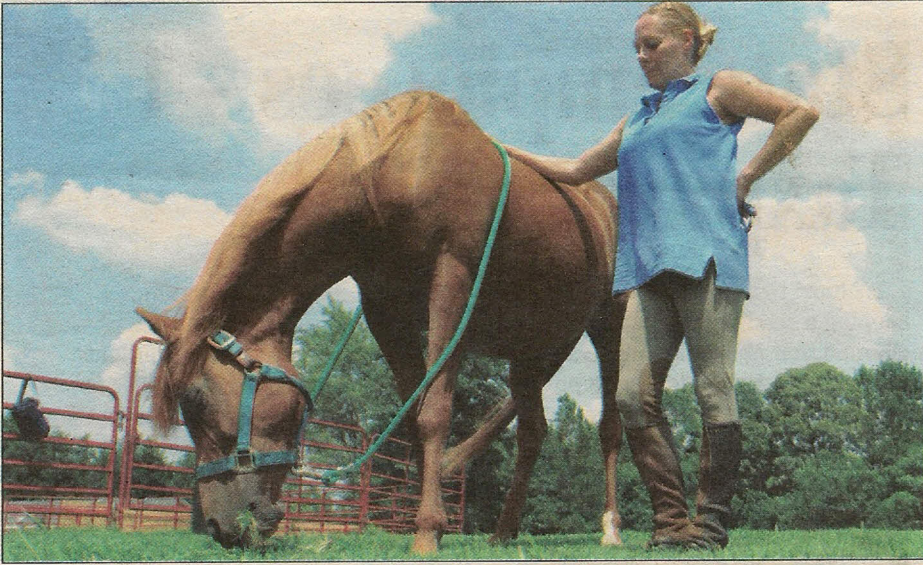
Walukewicz, who also takes animals seized in surrounding counties, has taken in more than a dozen over the past year.

She keeps the animals for 30 days at her 11-acre property off Centerville Road. That gives veterinarians time to treat any diseases the animals bring with them.

After that, the horse goes to a foster home or new owner. Local feed shops, veterinarians, horse owners and farriers chip in.

The county's proposed animal shelter faces a final vote Sept. 2. It is expected to pass - with details about its facilities left to the discretion of Anderson County Administrator Joey Preston and his staff.

Preliminary floor plans drawn up by the architectural firm Craig Gauden Davis show a



Eva Prado/Staff

TEMPORARY HOME: Horse advocate Nicole Walukewicz handles Chloe, a thoroughbred mare seized from a farm in Abbeville County.

20,000-square-foot facility devoted primarily to dogs and cats now housed in a 7,500-square-foot building.

No formal plans are in

place to include a paddock, stable or stocks for large animals, though Wallace said she and county staff are reviewing plans submitted by Walukewicz.

Greg Smith, the head of the county's Environmental Services Division, said nothing is being ruled out.

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