

Haven for Horses

New rescue operation saves one 'starfish' at a time

By **Brandy Nance (Contact)**

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In a vast ocean of unwanted and orphaned horses, Kristin Chambers is making a difference — a few horses at a time.

Chambers calls her rescued horses her starfish. As the story goes, a little boy was walking along the beach throwing starfish back into the ocean. He was asked why he was doing that — after all, he could only save a few and there were thousands lying in the sand.

The little boy replied as he threw a starfish into the ocean, "I made a difference to that one."

For Chambers, executive director for Winding Road Equine Rescue & Retirement, it's the same concept.

"We don't like to think about the ones that can't be saved," Chambers said. "But we focus on the ones that can. We call them our starfish."

Winding Road, which is located on 47 acres near Waverly, is in its infancy. It was incorporated late last year, Chambers said. The organization will be a 501 C-3 organization when the paperwork is completed. Chambers and Jack Wessels, another member of Winding Road, do not do any breeding at Winding Road. It is strictly a place for horses in need of homes.

Chambers said she decided to start a rescue for horses when she came across a 3-year-old black mare who was skin and bones. The horse was rehabilitated.

"Now she loves people and is in good health," she said.

Chambers just took off from there helping horses in need, she said.

Recently Chambers and Wessels went to Iowa to rescue horses from a sale, where many horses were in danger of going to slaughter.

"With all our efforts we got out 15 horses," Chambers said. "A Pennsylvania rescue got out 38."

Chambers and Wessels brought back five of those horses to Winding Road immediately following the sale. The other 10 horses will be coming to Winding Road soon.

When horses come to Winding Road, they are allowed to settle in first thing, Chambers said. She said unless there is an urgent medical illness the first thing is to build a trust relationship with the animal.

The horses are stabilized medically. Their teeth are worked on as well as their feet. Then their level of training has to be assessed.

"That will help us in placing the horse," Chambers said.

Eventually, horses will be fostered or put up for adoption. Foster families will have the first opportunity to adopt the horse. Adoptive and foster homes will be required to have letters of recommendation and inspection of available facilities for the animals. The family also will be assessed to see if they are ready to take on a project that could include a high-maintenance animal.

"The term in rescue is finding their forever home," Chambers said.

Future plans for the organization include making the place a community draw — a place where kids and families can learn about horses. Chambers and Wessels also hope they can host equine therapy.

"That's our big picture," Chambers said.

"It's an amazing thing to see," Wessels said, of therapeutic riding.

Wessels said horse contact will be beneficial for kids.

"That may very well be the first connection with kids, just come out and brush horses," Wessels said. "...There's a long human-to-horse history."