

# Equine Rescue Center & Sanctuary gives horses a new life

By TODD GUILD

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

**WATSONVILLE** — On a trip to the Equine Rescue Center & Sanctuary on the outskirts of Watsonville, visitors might get a warm greeting from several species of animals, not the least of which is David the goat, a friendly animal who demands pets and head-scratches by rubbing his sizable horns on visitors.

Several curious and affectionate horses also approach, some for affection and some to get a closer look at the strangers.

There are more than 40 horses that call the 60-acre property home, but most of them tend to stick close to the front gate to be close to Monica Hardeman, the woman who runs the no-kill sanctuary.

With an innate knowledge of equine behavior borne from years of working with the animals, Hardeman easily mingled among the herd, describing the behavior going on around her.

In one section of the pen, a female horse Hardeman described as "the coveted mare" attracted the attention of several males. As one male horse stood guard, another ground his teeth in frustration and others waited on the fringes.

"This is what herds do," she said, laughing.

In another area, several males were challenging each other while other horses scampered around, hoping for someone to play with.

Many of the horses, mules and ponies have benefited from Hardeman's ministrations and have become gentle and adoptable, but most have their own sad story of abuse, neglect or abandonment.

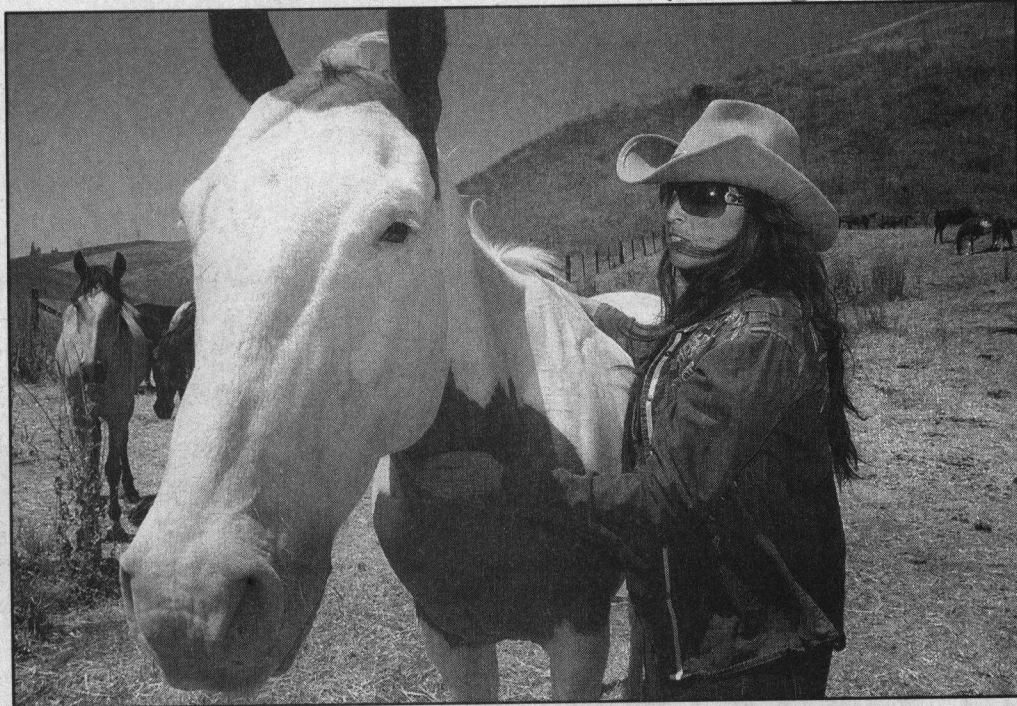
Several were once "slaughter-bound," meaning that their owners saw no use for them and sold them at auction.

But most of them have left that part of their lives behind thanks to Hardeman.

Hardeman has worked to rehabilitate the animals, helping them regain their weight and get healthy again by romping on the 60-acre property.

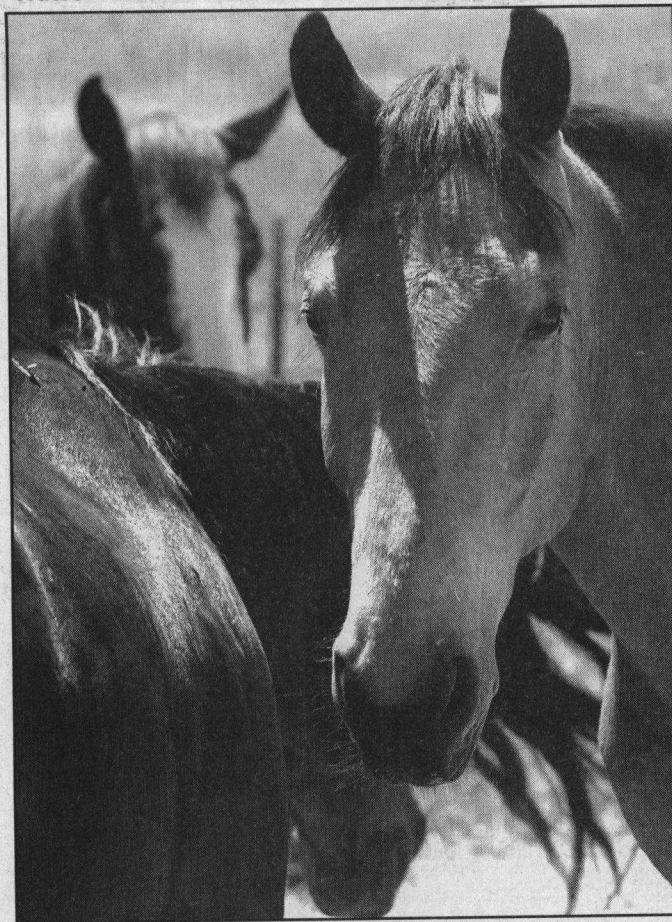
Most importantly, the horses learn to trust people again, so much so that many of them get adopted, which is the ultimate goal of the organization.

"My mission is to rescue horses," she said. "Give them a



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Monica Hardeman, owner of Equine Rescue Center, pays a visit to PJ, a paint horse, in Watsonville.



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Rescued horses are shown at Equine Rescue Center.

second chance and give them the life they deserve."

When they come to her, many have problems that come from the neglect and abuse they

suffered from their previous owners, she said.

Hardeman's job, she said, is to find those idiosyncrasies and work with the horses to make

them adoptable.

"Every horse can be trained," she said.

Her efforts seem to be paying off. Three will be adopted this week, while two more have adoptions pending.

Hardeman said she is often asked how she can make such a sacrifice, working on an isolated ranch with animals and forgoing the trappings of city life.

"I don't think it's a sacrifice," she said. "It's what has to be done. I'm lucky to have found something I love to do."

Hardeman said her love of horses began at an early age.

"I grew up around horses," she said. "I've had them all my life."

Her foray into rescue began in earnest, however, when she was 25 and her 29-year-old sister died.

"When my sister died I had to have something for myself," she said.

Taking care of animals that desperately need help, she said, has helped her heal.

"I never thought a life of service could make me so happy," she said. "I love it. There's nothing else I could do in this world."

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Equine Rescue Center runs solely on donations. For information, or to donate, visit [www.equinerescuecenter.com](http://www.equinerescuecenter.com), call 801-9805 or email Monica Hardeman at [monica@equinerescuecenter.com](mailto:monica@equinerescuecenter.com).