

Haven for old horses: Animals find sanctuary after life of service at Ferrell Hollow Farm

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Cindy Daigre with 2 of her senior horses Buddy, left and Big Mack right, who live at the horse sanctuary at the Ferrell Hollow Farm in Readyville, Tenn.. / HELEN COMER/DNJ

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READYVILLE — As Cindy Daigre steps into the fan-cooled shed situated on a hill at her 70-acre farm, a 2200-pound, 17.3 hand percheron draft horse named Big Mack steps toward her as his equine companion, Buddy, steps back.

“Buddy, he’s 11, a former carriage horse and has worked since he was 2 years old. He has bone chips in two joints in two different legs. So he’s lame and can’t work anymore,” says Cindy, founder of Ferrell Hollow Farm Senior Horse Sanctuary.

Buddy isn’t quite as friendly to visitors as Big Mack. Cindy says he was horribly abused and made to work beyond his physical limitations, so getting him to come out of his shell has been a slow process since he’s only been at the sanctuary two months. “He trusts

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Cindy Daigre with Buddy, who is one of several horses at the non-profit sanctuary at Ferrell Hollow Farm in Readyville. / HELEN COMER/DNJ



Horses graze at the horse sanctuary at the Ferrell Hollow Farm in Readyville. / HELEN COMER/DNJ

me and he's safe and he knows it, though," Cindy says, pulling out some hay so the horses can snack.

Ferrell Hollow boards four senior horses (owners pay for upkeep and care) and five others — including Buddy and Big Mack — are permanent residents. Siegfried is a 23-year-old retired jousting horse, Francis and Mary were New York City carriage horses.

"My passion is older horses. They are the least likely to find a homes. It costs a lot of money to keep them up. Unfortunately, a lot of people don't see the value in that. There's value in life still when you have quality of life. It's been difficult to manage that on my own. Everything I do goes back (into the sanctuary)," says Cindy, who also sells all-natural, herbal-based body and horse care products.

Currently, Cindy is looking to add a sixth horse to the sanctuary. She recently ran across a neglect case of a senior gelding that has not received vet, dental or hoof care, and he has a disability with one of his legs.

"The owners have agreed to surrender him to our senior horse sanctuary so these needs can be met and he is scheduled to arrive in a few days," Cindy says, explaining that it was an older person in bad health who was unable to properly care for the horse. "I don't know what kind of shape he's in, but he's not going to be in good shape."

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Taking care of a horse with medical needs can be costly. So she's seeking donations to her nonprofit sanctuary to help the horse get much-needed care. It costs at least \$500 a month per horse for food alone, and vet care for these ailing horses adds even more to the tab. Still, Cindy continues to find a way to do it because she has such a love of the horses.

The senior horse sanctuary has truly been a dream come true for Cindy, and the couple's hand-built log home is befitting the rolling acres of Ferrell Hollow Farm.

She bought the property, just 50 acres, in 1996 while still in graduate school at MTSU. There was a 100-year-old farmhouse at the front section of the land, and everything — including the farmhouse — was overgrown with foliage. "I had two horses and wanted my own place. I saw it had potential," Cindy says.

For nearly nine years, she lived in the farmhouse, where she also ran a counseling practice.

Eventually husband Alan came into the picture. As a custom wood artisan, Alan's dream was to build a log home. They both got what they wanted, although it was years in the making. For Cindy and Alan both, developing and maintaining Ferrell Hollow Farm is a labor of love.

The 2,600-square-foot house itself was a monumental undertaking, as the work was done by Alan and two other men.

Logs are Eastern white pine from East Tennessee. Because they wanted to keep a rustic feel to the home, each log was shaped by hand using antique tools. Logs were dove-tailed by hand and each fits snugly at the corners.

"We didn't want (the logs) to be all uniform. We've got the rustic look with modern conveniences," she says.

The small crew took five months to raise the logs into place. The longest log, at more than 40 feet in length, was hoisted into place with a bucket digger and lift, with Cindy at the helm of the controls.

Chinking between the logs was all done by hand, too, and cabinets were custom-designed by Alan.

In addition to the rustic log home, several of Alan's artful furniture pieces are used in decor, too, including his well-known rope rocking chairs. Antiques are part of the decor of the home as well.

"We didn't want to put just anything in the house," she says.

The front and side porch just may be the best part to the house, as it overlooks the hollow surrounding their homestead, with the picturesque horses in the background and rolling hills of Cannon County as a backdrop.

"This is what I was meant to be doing. We're very fortunate to be able to follow our passions," Cindy says.

For more information, visit ferrellhollowfarm.org.