

NYS Senate Testimony on June 6

by Diana Pikulski

With a few caveats, the care of Thoroughbreds after their racing careers have ended has steadily improved over the last fifteen to twenty years and the racing and breeding industries have taken significant steps towards this better situation.

Virtually every racetrack has a program to keep horses from going to slaughter. They are “no-questions-asked” policies where an owner or a trainer turns in the horse and the director of the program has the horse vetted and placed in either a retraining program or a retirement program. In NY, the Take the Lead program created by NYTHA in 2012 is a model program. A donation is made by NYTHA with every horse that is placed and they seem willing to negotiate a higher fee when the horse has to be retired for life because of long-term effects of injury.

Additionally, racetracks adopted a zero-tolerance policy for horses ending up in kill-pens or slaughter auctions. The NYRA policy, adopted in 2009 reads: *Any owner or trainer stabled at a NYRA track found to have directly or indirectly sold a horse for slaughter will have his or her stalls permanently revoked from all NYRA tracks. NYRA requires its horsemen to conduct due diligence on those buying horses and encourages them to support rescue and adoption efforts and to find humane ways of dealing with horses unable to continue racing.*

The increased awareness of thoroughbred aftercare has stimulated the market for thoroughbred riding and show horses. NYTHA and The Jockey Club are paying incentives at horse shows across the country 12 months a year to attract off-track thoroughbreds at all levels.

NYTHA's program is the TAKE2 Second Career Thoroughbred Program. It was created to promote second careers for retired Thoroughbred racehorses as hunters and jumpers. Supported by members of the racing and breeding industries, the program rewards those who compete on Thoroughbreds with awards and prize money in restricted classes and divisions at more than 350 horse shows in 23 states. TAKE2 League members compete for \$10,000 in year-end awards, and are eligible for the \$20,000 TAKE2 Finals.

I am most excited by the growing new opportunities for re-homing that don't necessarily involve riding and competition. Most notable these programs are in the general categories of equine therapy, and education. Here is a link to the series of articles that I write bi-monthly for the Thoroughbred Daily News. <https://www.thoroughbreddailynews.com/category/on-aftercare/>

Most recently, I have attended programs for high school students (Mechanicville High School is currently operating a program with Actt Naturally and it is being funded by trainer Chad Brown). Attached are photos from that program. These horses were competitive racehorses, stakes winners and one was recently gelded. Thoroughbred racehorses are not “crazy” and not scoffed at because they are misbehaved or badly damaged by racing as one witness said.

<http://www.thoroughbreddailynews.com/on-aftercare-program-helps-teens-thanks-to-funding-from-chad-brown/>

Thoroughbreds in programs to help people are ambassadors for the breed. They do real work. They help people. This is probably most remarkable in the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation's Prison-based programs. The Wallkill Correctional Facility in Wallkill, NY is an unequivocal success and is now in its 36th year of operation.

Racing has also created a national funding and accreditation system for the non-profits caring for horses and the NY breeders have set up funding mechanisms to support local accredited organizations called the Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance. Some feel that the organization is conflicted and subjective in its choices. There is a perceived conflict of interest because the organization does both the accrediting and makes the funding choices. Also, they do require some allegiance to the industry. One could argue that it should be about funding every horse in need, not favorite certain programs.

Still, funding for programs and retired horses both sound for riding and unsound is not adequate.

The number one issue is horse slaughter. A national bill must be passed to ban slaughter and the transport of horses for slaughter. A state ban would be helpful because many horses are driven through NY to slaughter outside of the country.

Thank you for this important opportunity.

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