Safe Haven in Hunt Country
Equine Rescue League opens after auction exposed

S

uccesses in animal protection are often slow in coming. However, this spring The HSUS was gratified by a small but heartwarming success story that will undoubtedly improve the lives of hundreds of horses. The HSUS has investigated atrocious conditions facing many horses sold through auctions nationwide. Last year one such investigation in Front Royal, Virginia, culminated in a raid on an auction and the seizure of several horses (see the Summer 1990 HSUS News). During the investigation, we saw horses with broken legs and noses, dislocated shoulders, burns, and infected wounds being sold and shipped to slaughter. Others with systemic infections such as strangles and pneumonia suffered such conditions that would otherwise languish and die in the barns and fields of Virginia. Ms. Rogers vowed that someday she would open a humane society for neglected horses that would otherwise languish and die in the barns and fields of Virginia. Although most articles contained touching stories about human couples, the reporter wrote a segment on Pat Rogers, describing her love for horse lovers, farriers, veterinarians, car-

To the two women, the most frustrating aspect of the investigation and seizing of neglected horses was the lack of facilities to house, care for, or rehabilitate such animals. Daily upkeep of the horses was very expensive, particularly when the abused horses and her determination to open a humane society. The story included a photo Gal Eisnitz had taken of a horse named Bitsy. The two women had found Bitsy lying on a stall floor, hidden away in the darkest recesses of an auction barn. A five-year-old ex-racing Thoroughbred, the horse had apparently been abandoned by her owner and left to die until somebody decided to cart her off to auction. Bitsy was so starved and crippled that she sold for only $75. The women fed her hay and made sure a veterinarian administered pain medication before she was sent on her last journey — to the slaughterhouse. Pat Rogers’s unique story and the pathetic picture of Bitsy shocked hunt-country readers. Ms. Rogers’s phone started ringing with offers of support. Among the callers was attorney and former Federal Com-

The HSUS encountered the same shortage of housing for the animals seized at the Front Royal auction. Even though The HSUS had made the commitment to pick up all expenses for the seized horses, it was months before we were able to convince local prosecutors to charge horse abusers for their crimes and to locate suitable places to house the animals.

In the midst of the investigations, Ms. Rogers vowed that someday she would open a humane society for neglected horses that would otherwise languish and die in the barns and fields of Virginia. Ms. Rogers showed community leaders the graphic photos shot during the HSUS investigation. Her presentations generated support and much needed funds. A Lexington, Virginia, landowner offered to allow the Equine Rescue League to use her sixty-

INVESTIGATIONS

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Its founding meeting was conducted in the tiny village of Lukett, Virginia, in April 1990. Scores of people volunteered their time and services; among them were horse owners, farriers, veterinarians, carpenters, feed store operators, printers, and accountants. The Equine Rescue League (ERL) became a reality.

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Although the farm, Churchland, was already in great condition, a corps of ERL volunteers built additional run-in sheds and fences and prepared the existing box stalls for their new occupants.

Within the first month of operation, sixty-three debilitated horses were given refuge by the ERL. Some had been taken from uncaring owners, others had been purchased at Virginia auctions. Seven pregnant, emaciated mares in the first group foaled within days of their arrival. Without the ERL, the mares and their foals would probably have died.

On May 11, 1991, Gal Eisnitz attended the ERL’s grand opening celebration. Over a thousand visitors milled about the grounds. During the celebration, Ms. Rogers and Ms. Eisnitz talked once again of Bitsy, who might have been saved, if only there had been a place to keep her. During the course of the HSUS investigations, they found hundreds of Bitsys but could not save them. Almost every one was shipped to slaughter because there was no place authorities could put them at the time. Now, at least in Virginia, there is.

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the information necessary to manage whale populations properly. It was clear that the IWC's computer models had failed to safeguard whale populations, since many had crashed to levels of near extinction under IWC's "scientifically based" management. It was obvious, as well, that it would be prudent to give whale populations a respite and to direct scientists' attentions to benign methods of calculating populations in the meantime.

The HSUS has always been opposed to putting all of our hopes for protecting whales in the scientific basket. We have maintained the position that killing whales is unethical and cruel. Whales are totally defenseless, have complex social structures that are disrupted when many individuals are removed from them, and play an important role in the marine ecosystem. They belong to the world, not to a handful of whalers who see them as theirs alone to exploit.

The risk in playing the "scientific" game became painfully clear when the IWC's scientific committee proposed a new computer model to estimate whale populations. Many countries (including the United States) have policies supporting the moratorium based almost entirely on the lack of scientific information for managing whale populations. The HSUS and others have kept the humane and ethical issues on their agenda. Unfortunately, that issue is not taken as seriously as we would like by those making decisions.

A vote was taken at the IWC meeting in May endorsing the new computer model. The United States and other member countries refined this position, adding more stringent requirements on allowable margins of error in estimating whale populations. Then, the scientists were sent back to their computers to put finishing touches to a model that was to be ready for review in 1992.

Thus, although the moratorium on commercial whaling remains intact for 1996, the wheels have been set in motion for quota (kill) recommendations to take effect as early as 1992, or, more likely, 1993. Although The HSUS is opposed to any whaling, the new model does push the world towards a more rationally determined level of whaling, should it ever begin again. The likelihood of full-scale whaling resuming for many subspecies seems remote. Blue, fin, sei, and other whales are still so rare that we are not likely to see their recovery for decades—if ever.

The HSUS supports New Zealand in its efforts to protect not only whales but dolphins as well. We intend to work to raise the level of debate in this country to one involving ethics as well as science. President Bush should hear from all Americans who believe that the time has come to end commercial whaling—and whale slaughter forever. The HSUS will redouble our efforts at numerous international gatherings, including the world summit on the environment, scheduled to be held in Brazil in June 1992.

It was at a meeting in 1972 that the first call for a whaling moratorium emerged. The twentieth anniversary of that meeting offers the opportunity to move into the twenty-first century with the new ethics of enlightened protection of nature.—Patricia Forkan, senior vice president.