

A decade ago, a legal seizure of 40 horses in Frederick County, Virginia created a crisis. Where would that many animals go? How would they find foster homes, and then permanent homes?

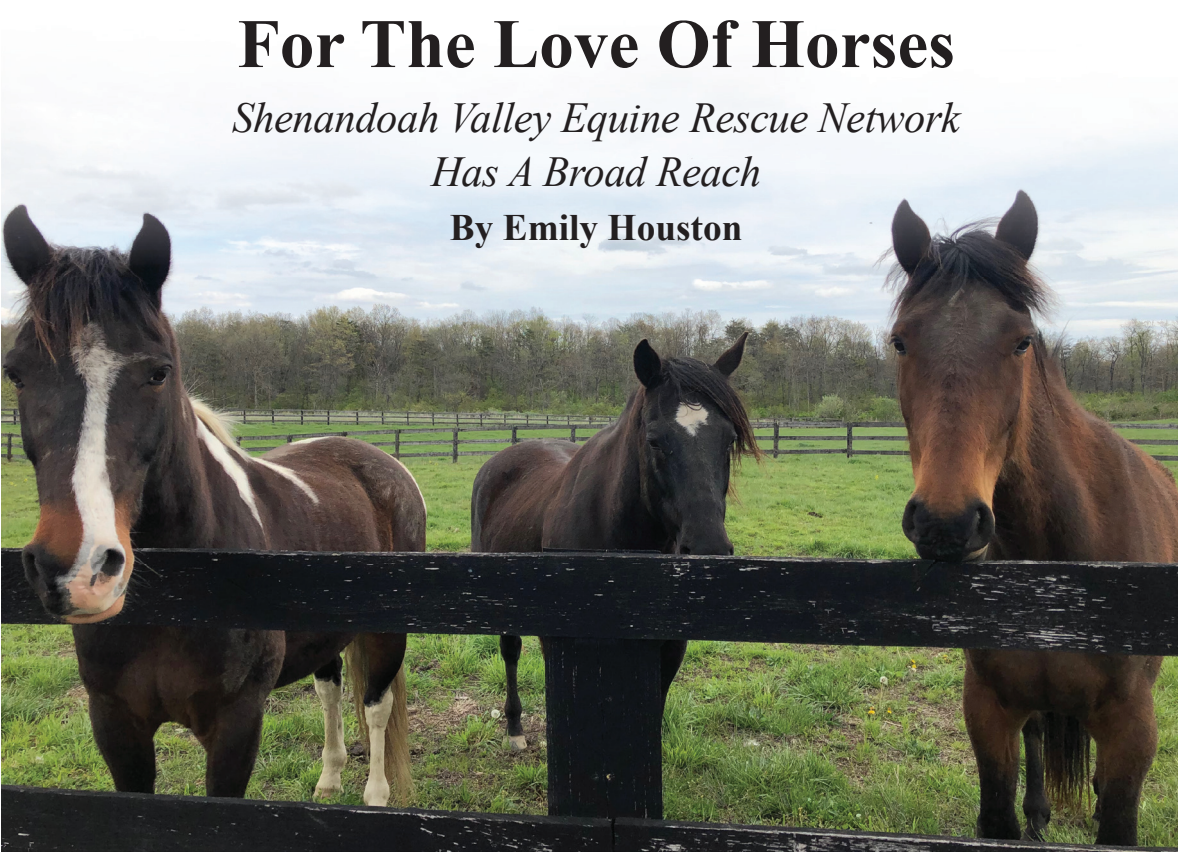
Shenandoah Valley Equine Rescue Network (SVERN) was born out of that crisis, created to deal with that situation.

Today, the organization takes in horses seized by law enforcement, and acts as a network to help owners who can no longer care for their animals to find good homes for them. Their facility also plays host to a behavioral management therapeutic program to assist (using horses) in the rehabilitation of substance abusers and troubled youth.

SVERN works with the sheriff’s offices in about one third of the state of Virginia, from Frederick County to as far south as Richmond.

When law enforcement officers seize animals due to neglect and abuse, SVERN is called. If they have room at their farm, they take the animals in. If they don’t, they rely on their network of concerned citizens and fellow rescues (about 30-40 of them), to take action and provide foster care and veterinary attention. The power of social media is put to work to place the horses (or donkeys).

That use of social media is especially useful in the case of owner surrenders. SVERN doesn’t take them at their farm because they want to give top



Paint horse Rocket’s owner became ill and could no longer care for him. He was left in a field for five years, and was never touched. It took SVERN volunteers three days to catch him. Rocket has been adopted!

Bree (middle) is an off-the-track Thoroughbred mare and is SVERN’s longest rescue resident. She is now “in sanctuary” which means she will never be put up for adoption, and will live the rest of her days in SVERN’s care.

Woody, the bay horse on the right, was abandoned in Richmond. A home buyer discovered that two horses were living in a field on their newly-purchased property. One of them was eight-month-old Woody.

priority to the legal seizures, which tend to be in poorer health and require a team of caregivers.

Owner surrenders are plugged into the SVERN network to find homes, whether fosters or

Both of these horses were abandoned with their owners died.



permanent. This is an especially useful service since the owners seeking homes for their horses are often older and struggling with health issues, making them unable to do this themselves. SVERN will post the horse(s) on social media, do a vet check, and act as liaison to facilitate the adoption. Now that horses live longer, the frequency with which the animals can outlive their owners has increased.

This year, for the first time ever, SVERN’s farm will be opening to the public for a special Halloween event on October 24. The SVERN board members want to offer a festive seasonal activity

for children, since so many other options have been shut down. The admission price is only charged for children – adults are free, as are kids under three.

SVERN’s fundraising events scheduled for earlier in the year had to be cancelled, so the hope is that this event will help fill the financial gap, and impart its mission of assistance to neglected horses to families in the area.

*For more information about providing for your horses during the estate planning process, please see the article on Pet Trusts on page. 43.*



Mini Marshmallow (the palomino curious about the camera) was seized in Warren County. Little Joe, the paint, is the SVERN mascot. He came from Rockingham County. Tootsie, the gray, was part of a three-horse seizure in King William County.



Mac, the gray Percheron cross, had been left in a field in Shenandoah County when his owner became ill. He was one of four animals taken in by SVERN, which included two mini donkeys.

The mare in the middle is Barbara Ann. She came to SVERN along with Rocket (who is standing next to her).



Donkeys Gretchen and Ivan arrived with Mac, the Percheron cross. They are “in sanctuary,” so SVERN is their permanent home.