

Final Turn

OWN RESPONSIBLY By Dr. Tom Lenz

I've worn many hats, figuratively and literally, in the course of a long veterinary career, and with each of them I have done my best to improve the quality of life for our equine friends.

I'm wearing a new hat these days: chairman of the Unwanted Horse Coalition. It's not so much that I needed to fill some spare time in my schedule, but rather that I so deeply believe in the mission of the UHC that I want to be involved and want it to succeed.

The mission, for those of you not yet familiar with the UHC, is to reduce the number of unwanted horses and to improve their welfare through education and the efforts of organizations committed to the health, safety, and responsible care and disposition of these horses.

As Jay Hickey of the American Horse Council has remarked, "Our real goal is to put the coalition out of business!"

The UHC, in fact, traces its roots to the AHC annual convention in April 2005. At the convention, the American Association of Equine Practitioners hosted the Unwanted Horse Summit, which brought together key equine industry stakeholders to discuss the plight of the unwanted horse in America.

In June 2006, the UHC became part of the AHC, where it still resides. It is funded by member fees and individual donations. Members to date include the AAEP, American Paint Horse Association, American Quarter Horse Association, American Veterinary Medical Association, The Jockey Club, Maryland Horse Breeders Association, Masters of Foxhounds Association of America, Mustang Heritage Foundation, National Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association, National Thoroughbred Racing Association, Professional Rodeo Stock Contractors, AHC State Horse Council Committee, Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association, United States Equestrian Federation, and United States Trotting Association.

As with any broad-based undertaking, it took a while to get everyone on the same page and moving in the same direction,

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but we've made considerable progress in recent months.

At our first meeting under the aegis of the AHC, held in Lexington last October, we established committees and set goals, many of which have already been met.

In late March, we published 15,000 copies of an "awareness brochure" and launched our Web site (www.unwantedhorsecoalition.org). We also created a motto for the UHC: "Own Responsibly." The motto is directed toward horse owners, whether they are prospective owners or current owners.

It's a simple philosophy, and one that makes perfect sense. If prospective and current horse owners are responsible and research their options before they commit to buy, breed, or sell a horse, the result will be fewer unwanted horses.

Education is and will always be the most important component of this initiative. We strive to provide resources that help educate people so they make the correct decisions when it comes to owning responsibly.

The Web site includes information on the costs of ownership, alternatives to ownership, second careers for horses, questions to consider before you breed your horse, and resources to help when you can no longer keep your horse. The site's resources page links to documents, provided by member organizations, which touch on the plight of

the unwanted horse, rescue and retirement, ownership, charitable contributions, and euthanasia.

That last topic is not one that most horse owners want to think about, but for some horses, it is the best and most humane option. One of the keys to being a responsible horse owner is knowing all of your options.

Since its launch, the Web site has seen a steady increase in visitors, many with constructive suggestions.

It is comforting to see so many factions pulling together for a common cause...and a most deserving one at that. We need to educate horse owners and prospective horse owners; we need them all to "own responsibly."

Our Web site and our published materials show them how to do that.

Please tell any horse owner you know about the Unwanted Horse Coalition and its work. Then we can put it out of business that much sooner. 🐾