

Written by Victoria Fouts

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Jen Brumbaugh, Executive Director of Healing Hearts Animal Rescue and Refuge, sat down with AFM to discuss the need for an animal refuge in Arizona and some of their recent cases. The organization is growing to meet increasing demands and they hope to one day reach their goal of providing a “forever home” and a safe place for all animals in need.

AFM: Can you tell me a more about Healing Hearts?

JB: Healing Hearts was established in 2005 by Betty Welton, the president and founder. She felt that there was an urgent need for a rescue to dedicate itself to rehab abused and neglected animals, specifically large breeds such as horses, cows, pigs, sheep, burros, ect. She began Healing Hearts in Willcox, Arizona and over the last couple years we have adopted out probably 50 or so horses; we've adopted out several goats, burros, donkeys. We are lucky enough that we just collaborated with the Humane Society at South Mountain to utilize their horse facilities. So we are going to be bringing up between 10 to 12 horses that are going to be adoptable and we are hoping to double our numbers this year.

AFM: How did you get involved in Healing Hearts personally?

JB: Betty Welton, our founder- I actually worked with her at Arizona Animal Welfare League. Then when Betty left and started her own rescue she had asked me to come onto the Board. So, I've been on the Board since right after its inception and then they asked me to be the Executive Director since I have been involved for so long.

AFM: Who usually adopts these larger animals? People at their own private farms?

JB: Yes. People who have maybe their own hobby farm and companion animals. We have several horses that are definitely rideable; they are beautiful animals. Lynn, who is our ranch manager down in Willcox, works hand in hand with volunteers. We bring in trainers to get these horses rehabbed that may have been coming from really poor situations. For instance, we just worked with Pima County authorities in the seizure of three starving horses down in Mescal; those horses were so severely starved, they had a body score of one which means they basically couldn't get any worse off. Their own bodies basically are using the fat that they have left to survive. They hadn't been fed, probably for months. So we just took on those and a seizure case up in Cave Creek last week. If you just Google “Cave Creek horse rescue,” you'll see it. It was horrendous; it was one of the worst they'd ever seen. This woman had over 20 horses on her property, four were dead I believe on the property just lying there. We ended up taking three of those horses- it was a mare and her colt and then also the colt's half-sister who was just about a year old. That mom also had a body score of one and her bones are just sticking out of her body. It's horrendous. So, we feel like we've done a lot of good since our inception and with the facility up in Phoenix now we are going to be able to do so much more.

AFM: You also handle more popular companion animals like cats and dogs, correct?

JB: We have done dogs and cats and we place them. We continuously are helping to place animals but right now our biggest goal is to build a cattery down in Wilcox. It's going to specifically for those cats that are not adoptable so they can live out their lives whether they have medical issues or behavioral issues- those cats that perhaps the shelters here and down in Tucson or Willcox can't place and don't have a place to go. We've modeled our refuge after Best Friends in Utah and so our goal is to be able to allow any animals we get to live out their lives. We hope that they are going to be able to be adoptable but if they're not, then we welcome them to live out their lives at the rescue.

AFM: How do you keep the refuge from becoming overcrowded without practicing euthanasia?

JB: Well, we do it for severe medical issues, you know, humane issues. But we don't do it for behavior. You know, it's a hard position to be in because every day we get calls and every day we hear stories of cases of starving animals or abused animals. The beauty of Betty, who is this amazing person who has so many connections and knows so many people, she's a great facilitator and that's really important in the rescue world, to be able to facilitate adoptions and placements not even in your own rescue. She might hear of a case and say “I think this group or this location is better.” Because we get calls from all over the state and Willcox is almost three hours from here (Phoenix). So now with our new facility it will be a different story and we can place people in our facility in Phoenix. There are days you have to say “no,” but if we aren't able to take an animal we work our darndest to be able to facilitate placement. Betty does that specifically because she's on the Arizona Coalition for Equine, which is also known as ACE. They work with lots of horse rescues so they are able to get the word out, kind of spread the word saying “Hey, is anybody able to take a horse?” or “Is there a placement?” Another goal is that if an individual is having a hard time paying for their hay or they're not able to buy it or they are two days away from not being able to feed their animals, then ACE will come in and provide the hay and work with the individual. Especially with large animals, it's best if they can stay in their present home. It's not like a dog or a cat that you can

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bring into your house and put into a kennel. You have to be zoned for horses, you have to have the room, you have to have the facilities and you have to be able to feed them. It's a very difficult placement when you have a large animal. We get calls for cows, we get calls for horses, for goats and pigs. We've had a lot of calls for pigs lately, actually. People get them when they are little, like potbellies, and think they're really cute and then all of a sudden they become these gigantic animals and people aren't prepared and probably not even qualified to care for these animals.

AFM: How big of a problem are animal abuse, neglect and overpopulation in Arizona?

JB: It's a huge problem. I've been on the Board of Directors for Healing Hearts for almost five years and have been the Executive Director for only three months and I have never seen or heard of so many cases that we have seen in the past three weeks. If you are going to be willing to step up and care for these horses and place these horses in your refuge, you have to be able to provide the care. The horses that came in when they were starving had to be fed every two hours because we had to reintroduce them to food since they hadn't been fed in months. These horses were healthy until a while ago and they can decline very, very fast. We now have 45 horses at the refuge in Willcox and then our caretaker took on these three new horses that were extremely ill, so she was with them around the clock. They have to have so many supplements; they have to see a vet and a farrier- the costs add up very quickly for large breed animals. You really have to be conscious of that when you run an organization. How is this going to affect our organization if we take on these three, which we found in Mescal and all of a sudden we have these three new cases from last week in Cave Creek? Healing hearts really felt that this, of all, is our true mission and these animals are who really need our immediate help. There's no ifs-and-or buts. We got the call and said "Absolutely" and were lucky enough because we had a woman willing to foster who had contacted me the day before. So she is actually caring for them up in New River for us. She has been a nurse for these animals, she's been feeding them every two hours, working with them and the vet hand in hand. It's amazing the dichotomy of how good humans can be and how poor humans can act at the same time. I think we are the good and our volunteers and our fosters; you know these people who donate and help are the good. People who called on those cases are so good. But it's shocking to see that someone can live with horses dying on their property. I know the woman in Cave Creek is facing two federal counts of animal abuse and I'm not sure how many misdemeanors. It's pretty heavy, it's pretty heavy stuff.

AFM: What ways does Healing Hearts get involved in the community and raise awareness about these issues?

JB: Since we are primarily located in Willcox, but we have our administrative offices here (in Phoenix), we have several events throughout the year. We have a big casino night coming up Nov. 9 up at D.C. Ranch. We are able to spread the word with our donors. When we open up the satellite facility on the Humane campus, we are definitely are going to want to start an education program and introduce kids to horsemanship and the realities of caring for a horse, what goes into a horse why we have these horses and what lets these horses be with us. It is heavy material for kids to take on but animal abuse is really serious. I think teaching children very young to respect every one and all animals is really important. So that will be a big part of our education process down there.

AFM: What are some of the best ways for people to get involved to help protect these animals?

JB: The best thing people can do if they see something is to call. Call the authorities. What's hard is, and I'm just learning this as well, horses are still considered livestock. So, that's what the difficulty is a lot of times is people see these starving animals and don't know who to call; they want to call the police but the police actually have to get the Department of Agriculture involved and the Livestock Department involved. For large animals, such as horses, call the Department of Agriculture or your local sheriff's department or Livestock. For any smaller animals, like companion animals like dogs and cats, call Animal Care and Control. That's always going to be the first step. If there is a lost animal or an animal is being injured, call 911 and talk to your police. I think too many times people think the next person is going to do something and they don't want to get involved because it takes a lot; it takes a lot of heart and soul to witness something like that and sometimes they want to close their eyes because it's easier. You also definitely need to follow up and say "Here is the case number you gave me. I want to see if the animal was removed. Can you tell me that? Is the animal still there? I have great concerns." And let them know what your concerns are with the animal.

For more information about Healing Hearts Animal Rescue and Refuge, click [here](#).

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