

Field of Dreams Horse Rescue and Adoption

Like many women who become empty nesters, Cathy Klink of St. Charles wanted to embellish her life to maintain a healthy balance. But unlike other women, Klink opted for a new best friend – a 1,200 pound, 10-year-old who will take as much time and attention as Klink offers.

Klink's friend is Arthur, a quarter horse with leg injuries and a feisty attitude, whom she met by volunteering with Field of Dreams Horse Rescue and Adoption. The organization takes in abused and neglected horses, rehabilitates them and finds permanent homes for them.

“How's my baby?” Klink said as she approached Arthur at the FODHRA barn off Brundige Road, west of Geneva. Arthur stirred at the sound of her voice and peeked out of his stall. Klink walked into the stall and slipped a halter onto Arthur's head. He pulled his ears back and chomped his teeth.

“I know, I know,” she said to Arthur while patting him on the nose. “He can be a stinker, but he's my stinker. Are you gonna be a good boy for me today?”

Their relationship started about a year ago, when a woman walked into the office where Klink was working, wearing a FODHRA shirt and a hat with horse's face on it. They started talking and Klink decided to try volunteering for the group. Klink “always had a thing for horses,” despite never really working with them before. She's also had a unfulfilled desire to become a veterinarian.

“They took me out to the barn and I said ‘Oh, this is cool,’” she said. “I just think they are beautiful animals. They asked if I was comfortable with this. I had no hesitation.”

New volunteers spend time with those who have been helping out for a while to get them acclimated to being around the horses. Other non-barn related opportunities are available for volunteers who do not wish to spend time directly with the horses. For information, visit the FODHRA website.

Besides spending time walking and grooming Arthur, Klink helps clean the stalls and helps with other necessary barn work during her twice-weekly shifts. She said she wasn't nervous getting up-close-and-personal with horses that can weigh well over 1,000 pounds.

“They are huge and he can be intimidating, but I'm pretty comfortable,” she said.

Addie Stras, FODHRA board member, said Klink's enthusiasm is what makes her the ideal volunteer.

“Cathy’s always ready, she’s always prepared and she knows the horses really well,” Stras said. “She really understands the Field of Dreams vision.”

Klink’s philosophy of doing whatever is best for the horses does indeed mesh with the FODHRA concept. She is particularly protective of Arthur, whose prior suffering motivated her to help him as much as possible.

“His former owner tried to beat him into doing what he wanted,” Klink said of Arthur. “He drugged him up and sold him to another couple as if nothing was wrong with him. When he came here, he could hardly walk. He was very spirited, but he wasn’t showing it because of his legs.”

The best solution was to have the nerves cut in his legs, so he wouldn’t feel the pain and could walk without misery again. Because of his condition, he cannot be ridden.

“His problems are still there, he just can’t feel it,” Klink said. “I’ve had to relearn his personality because it’s changed. He feels so much better.”

She remembers when he returned from surgery and started snorting and whinnying like never before.

“His attitude was ‘I’m back, watch out. I feel great,’” Klink said. “The goal is to have someone adopt him in a forever home. He’ll make a great companion horse.”

Arthur walked out of his stall and strolled into the corral for some fresh air. He’s housed with five other horses up for adoption through FODHRA, along with one pony and one 45-year-old donkey named Orlando.

Jasper, a thoroughbred horse with lung problems, grunts and fusses in his stall at the sight of Klink walking with Arthur. Jasper, who is up for adoption and could never race, but can be ridden as a trail horse. He is a “roarer;” he emits deep rumbling noises when breathing, prompting volunteers to sometimes call him “Darth Vader.”

Jasper’s lung-related struggles began when he swallowed amniotic fluid during birth. Other horses, prior to being taken in by FODRHA, were subject to dog attacks, severe neglect, abandonment and abuse by previous owners.

“You learn their personalities,” Klink said. “As long as you respect them and listen to them, you’ll do fine. You can tell when they don’t want to be bothered. It’s great therapy, working with these people in this barn. As soon as I get in my car to come here, I can feel my stress go away. It’s like I’ve had a massage.”

Klink never tires of the hard work required at the barn.

“The horses have done more for me than I do for them,” she said. “In one year, I’ve learned so much. They say that Disney World is the happiest place in the world. To me, the barn is more fun.”