

A passion for horses has inspired an Apopka woman to become involved in rescuing the animals she loves from what she calls "killers."

Amber Randolph has rescued 50 horses in the last two years, many of them from kill buyers who transport the animals to Mexico or Canada to be slaughtered for human consumption and ship the meat to European countries. Similar plants in the United States were shut down after diligent work by several animal rights groups, in which Randolph took part. Because of the cruelty in the Mexican plants, she is determined to rescue as many horses as she can.

"Mexico's method of slaughter is deemed to cause so much pain that it is banned in this country by the U.S. Department of Agriculture," according to the Washington-based Humane Society of the United States, a major campaigner against the American slaughterhouses.

"Horses are 'stunned' with a sharp knife aimed at severing their spinal cord. This leaves the horses paralyzed and unable to breathe, but still sensitive to pain as they are dragged from the kill box, hoisted up by a chain and their necks slit."

Others have simply been abandoned when their owners can no longer afford to care for them. She recently took in a Percheron after more than 30 starving horses were found by the Humane Society/SPCA of Sumter County last August.

Randolph had been caring for the horses at her home in



Amber Randolph, (l), and Erica Baldwin, with her son, Kyle, stand with the Percheron that was rescued from Sumter County.

Apopka, but recently, she leased 35 acres off CR 448 in Mount Dora. With four separate pastures, a barn and a lake, she hopes to board horses for others to help finance her rescues. She is currently seeking 501-c (3) status for her organization, New Beginnings Equine Facility.

After 13 years involved in horse rescue, Randolph has noticed some new trends recently. "The quality of horse that needs to be rescued is much better," she said. Before it was only old horses that were no longer able to work or be ridden that were abandoned, but the downward swing in the economy has led to more horse farms and businesses closing and the owners often hire auctioneers to sell the animals to the highest bidder.

Randolph has several registered horses at her facility, many of them already trained for a riding. She even has a registered racehorse, Excitable Trick, that commanded \$30,000 for a stud fee before he was gelded. Several of the horses are ready for adoption, she said.

When she receives a call about a horse needing to be rescued, Randolph brings them back to her property, where she provides medical care, food, training, gelding, and most importantly, love. "We spend a lot of time and energy with these horses," she said. "There's a lot of love put into them; we're not just giving them food and a place to stay. We love every single one of them that comes in here and it's sad every time somebody leaves."

But leave they must, because it is Randolph's goal that all the horses who can be adopted find loving homes. She keeps in touch with the new owners, and if she feels the owner is not properly taking care of the animal, she buys them back. Some people have even adopted one of horses and then board it at New Beginnings.

There are some people who share Randolph's mission and work as hard as she does at the facility. Erica Baldwin and Dr. Rick Rubinstein both spend much time helping with the horses. Rubinstein, a veterinarian who will soon open a small animal practice on Park Avenue in Apopka, donates medicine and provides medical care when he is able. He is impressed by the care that Randolph gives her animals. "I've worked with many rescue groups over the years and there are a lot out there that aren't as dedicated or efficient as they should be, but Amber, with the things she does for these horses, is a great thing."

Randolph is seeking volunteers and donations for New Beginnings. Volunteers are needed to feed, groom and bathe the horses, clean stalls and do general maintenance work. Supplies, such as hay, tack, medicine, cash donations and other items are also needed. All donations and inquiries can be mailed to Amber Randolph, P.O. Box 1408, Apopka, 32704. If anyone is interested in adopting a horse, they can visit the facility at 17100 CR 448, Mount Dora.