



PHOTOS PAGES 21 & 23: WIB MIDDLETON

FOR THE LOVE OF HORSES

BY JANE THERY

Enter Montgomery County's Agricultural Reserve and what do you see? Plenty of horses! These noble animals are a fixture along its peaceful roads and byways. Interestingly, horses were not even a consideration in the original planning of the Agricultural Reserve according to Royce Hanson, the visionary behind the 1980 establishment of the Reserve. The decision to set aside the land to protect it from rampant development was made based on the emerging patterns of small-plot home building and the need to maintain the value of farmland through a system of 25-acre zoning and salable development rights. Back then the horse community was still thriving around Potomac and areas closer to the Capital Beltway. Luckily, the Agricultural Reserve was there to become the future home to most of Montgomery County's 10,000 to 12,000 horses.

A rule of thumb for a horse farm is two horses per acre. Land is needed for pastures, hay fields, barns, riding arenas, competitions and trails. So as development encroached on older horse farms and riding areas, the community began to migrate into the Agricultural Reserve. Today, about 60 percent of the livestock in the Reserve is horses. Thoroughbreds, Friesians, Oldenburgs, Hanoverians, Trakehners, Quarter

Horses, Welsh and Shetland Ponies, Connemara Ponies, Standardbreds, Arabians and more can all be found on the 300-plus horse farms in the Reserve!

My horse, Quattro au Lait, a French sport horse breed, lives at Wyndham Oaks Farm on Bucklodge Road in Boyds. Wyndham Oaks is a premier boarding stable with 65 horses. It has a large indoor arena, outdoor riding rings, large paddocks, a modern barn and access to miles and miles of trails in the Reserve. There you'll find dressage horses practicing the art of movements developed in the European tradition of refined military



PHOTO: RAFA CRUZ

Jane Thery with Quattro au Lait at Wyndham Oaks Farm, a dressage and boarding stable located in Boyds, MD.

training of the horse, now more akin to horse ballet, which at the highest level is performed to music; eventing horses practicing the triathlon of the horse world—dressage, cross-country jumping at a gallop over open country, and show jumping over poles in a ring; and trail-riding horses who carry their riders through the fields and woods along Bucklodge Road and into Seneca Creek State Park. There are also horses there that follow the hounds in the historic Potomac Hunt, galloping over hill and dale tracking the scent of the wild fox. Quattro au Lait and I practice dressage, mini-jumping and trail riding, and he gets plenty of treats for his efforts! Throughout the Reserve, you will also find older horses, retired from sporting activities but still a great pleasure to their owners who oversee their care.

There are about fifty boarding stables in the Reserve. These range from small back-yard barns to big facilities like Wyndham Oaks. The monthly price of boarding a horse

ranges from \$500 for simple field boarding to \$2,000 that would include full training, grooming and competition coaching. Many of the owners of the horses boarded in the Reserve live inside the Capital Beltway, including Washington, DC. A typical owner will drive to the barn several times a week, stopping to run errands, have a meal, buy horse equipment and supplies at the tack store and becoming very attached to the beauty and open space of the Reserve. These boarded horses also need farriers services to trim and shoe them, veterinarian services for shots and treatments, feed and hay from local providers, barn managers and staff, blankets and blanket cleaning services, as well as special services such as horse massage. So, the board fees, the horse services and the owner expenditures all add up to a big boost to the economy of the Reserve and the County in general.

There are also many private

barns where owners enjoy recreational riding, horse sports, horse breeding or just keeping horses for equine company. You'll find stables offering riding lessons and trail rides; stables specializing in therapeutic riding for physically and emotionally challenged children and adults; and western riding stables providing competitive reining instruction.

Are you ready to ride?

Calleva Farm offers riding lessons and horsemanship education. Waredaca Farm has packages with trail rides followed by beer sampling. The farm has very well-trained trail horses and their



The photo was taken during the Mystery Trail Ride to benefit Great and Small, a nonprofit based in Boyds, MD, that provides equine assisted therapies to children and adults of all ages affected by physical, developmental, emotional, and learning disabilities. Photo: Austen Gage

beer-tasting room and picnic area overlook beautiful horse pastures.

A relatively new way to enjoy horses without taking on the full responsibility of owning a horse is to lease or half lease a horse. The horses are generally at a boarding facility and the owner arranges for the lease of the horse depending on the rider's level of experience and type of riding suitable to the horse. Riding clubs such as Trail Riders of Today, the Seneca and Potomac Pony Clubs, the Congressional Polo Club, the Potomac Hunt, and the Sugarloaf Riding Club also create a welcoming community for riders and non-riders who enjoy socializing, picnicking and sharing horse stories.

Competition venues, such as Loch Moy and Waredaca, host dressage, show jumping and eventing shows as well as clinics offered by high-level professionals. Many boarding stables also offer friendly competitions and clinics. Spectators are welcome! This is a good way to visit a farm or competition venue in the Reserve. Bittersweet Field on Partnership Road hosts the Seneca Pony Club Eventing competitions as well as the popular Potomac Hunt Races where the tailgates include fanciful decorations as well as plenty of food and drink. And there's polo, too! The Congressional Polo Club on Hughes Road has a polo field where you can enjoy local and international quality polo. Again, spectators are welcome for a day in the country watching this fast-paced sport.

Horses connect us to the natural world through their lively animal spirits and the outdoor recreation and sports we can

enjoy together. The horse community promotes the economic viability of open land near urban areas and the preservation of rural areas with pastures, hay fields, trails and woodlots. For example, the Potomac Hunt maintains the trails and values relationships with over 200 land owners who provide riding access to their properties. The volunteers at Great and Small stables who assist the trained staff at the therapeutic riding barn on the 100-acre Rickman Farm Horse Park have a wonderful experience of helping horses help people in a very special environment. The friends of the Woodstock Equestrian Park commit to maintaining this wonderful public facility with

its riding fields, ring and trail network. Without a doubt, the love of horses brings people together who enjoy and appreciate the value of the Agricultural Reserve, just as the horses appreciate its green pastures and peaceful environment.

Jane Thery is a life-long equestrian and president of Green Horse Enterprises, promoting the horse health and environmental benefits of well-managed horse farms. She serves on the advisory committee of the national Equine Land Conservation Resource organization and chairs the Maryland Horse Council's Farm Stewardship Committee. She has held senior positions in international diplomacy and economics with a focus on Latin America.



NOW THAT'S A LOT OF HORSE MANURE!

Horse manure is a marvelous gift of natural nutrients from our horses to our soil. Each horse produces an astounding 55 pounds of horse manure every day. Now multiply that by 10,000! Horses are grazing animals whose stomachs digest fiber mostly from grass and hay, supplemented by grain feed. Great ways to recycle horse manure include composting it for enrichment of your garden's soil, or, if bedding horses on straw, growing mushrooms! There are major mushroom growers in our region that use horse manure as a substrate for many varieties of mushrooms. As chemical fertilizers are phased out, composted horse manure is a great alternative for slow-release, natural soil nutrients.