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# SAVING UNWANTED HORSES: *The Rizzo Solution*

by Chriss Swaney

**P**aul Rizzo and daughter Rachelle are engineering brighter futures for unwanted rescue horses on their 100-acre Murrysville farm.

Pleasant Valley Rescue Ranch, a horse sanctuary run by the Rizzo family, is dedicated to providing shelter and support to unwanted horses, both temporarily or permanent for those not attractive enough for adoption. At present, the rescue facility supports seven Quarter horses ranging in age from 12 to 22.

“Each horse has a unique personality that can include unflinching loyalty, a full understanding where they fit in the herd hierarchy, a memory that remembers all the good and bad interactions with humans, and unparalleled patience and understanding if treated with respect and dignity. All horses are the product of their environment and their treatment from foaling to what happened yesterday! Indeed, they are not humans, but they have more human characteristics than humans realize,” according to Paul Rizzo, a civil engineer, president of Rizzo Associates and the 2005 winner of the prestigious Metcalf Award from the Engineers’ Society of Western Pennsylvania (ESWP).

Like most engineers, Paul Rizzo is a problem solver. The problem: A typical horse has a lifespan of 20 years and several owners. While most find loving owners who cherish them, some fall victim to abuse and neglect. In fact, more than 100,000 horses in the U.S. are unwanted and the problem is inflamed by the mandated closure of U.S. slaughter houses.

An estimated 147,000 unwanted horses were shipped in 2013 to slaughter houses in Canada and Mexico. And those export numbers have surged since then.



Paul Rizzo



Rachelle Rizzo

But it’s places like the Rizzo rescue ranch that are making a small dent in the lives of these most vulnerable, unwanted equines. As members of the national Unwanted Horse Coalition, a broad alliance of equine organizations that have joined under the American Horse Council to educate the horse industry about the problem of unwanted horses, the Rizzos are leading the charge to make the public aware of the problem.

“We have a half dozen or more volunteers who come and help us exercise the horses,” said Rachelle Rizzo. And the Rizzos are also actively cultivating the best agricultural engineering practices by keeping several fields fallow to improve grazing pasture for the rescued horses. They also work incessantly to properly handle all horse manure. The Pennsylvania DEP does little to force farmers to manage manure runoff which spoiled some 5,706 miles of Pennsylvania streams in 2015, the latest figures available.

“My father, Paul Rizzo, operates the farm machinery,” said Rachelle Rizzo, who feeds and waters the horses at 5 a.m. before heading to work at her father’s engineering firm. Yearly, the seven rescue horses consume 5,000 pounds of grain, 11 tons of round hay bales and 40 tons of square hay bales.

Since the 1890s, when a young America turned from the frontier farm and began to embrace a manufacturing economy, the worlds of science, business, labor, and agriculture have come together in this country – sometimes at collision speed – to produce a cornucopia of new goods and services. The Rizzo family is spurring further agricultural agility and productivity with their horse rescue operation.

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