



Nevada Department of Corrections

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Press Release

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Wild Horse Adoption to be hosted online

When inmate Austin Miller started working with wild horses nearly two years ago at the Stewart Conservation Camp in Carson City, he knew very little about horses.

"I'd been drug along on trail rides and that's about it," he recalled.

Learning to tame the wild animals, wasn't easy. He got bucked off several times and even got kicked.

"It can be overwhelming at first," he said. "They're big animals and they can be intimidating. It just takes being humble and patient."

It's a lesson he hopes to take with him when he's released in about a year.

"You just have to accept that you're going to get thrown into situations that are over your head," he said. "It's the same thing, you just have to stay patient and humble. It gives me confidence for when I get out there. If I can do this, I think I can do anything."

He's working with three horses and one burro that are set to be adopted next week through a partnership between the Nevada Department of Corrections and the Bureau of Land Management's Wild Horse and Burro program.

A portion of the feral horses rounded up on the Nevada range are taken to the Silver State Industries Ranch, housed at Stewart Conservation Camp. Once there, inmates work with the horses to get them ready for adoption to private owners as well as placement in state and federal programs, such as U.S. Border Patrol, the U.S. Marine Corps and various police departments.

"We have a good relationship with the wild-horse advocates, and we have a good relationship with the BLM," said ranch manager Justin Pope. "We bring those two entities together, in what can sometimes be an adversarial relationship, by the good work that we do."

Horse trainer Hank Curry has spent the last 18 years turning convicts into cowboys.

"I'm trying to create citizens out of knuckleheads," he joked. "These guys don't think so. They think I'm just a mean old man."

Miller clarified, "I don't think this program would work without him. We all look up to him."

Curry teaches the inmates ways to relate to the horses, and along the way, they learn life lessons.

"I try to teach them different techniques, not just one way," he said. "That opens up your mind."

Even for an old hand like Dan Shangle, who grew up around horses, there is wisdom to be gleaned from Curry and his methods.

“I had my own ways, but I had to learn Hank’s way,” Shangle said. “It’s been the best thing I’ve ever done.”

He is training his second horse, Comet, for the adoption -- which has given him a purpose.

“There are days in the winter when you don’t want to get out of bed because it’s so dark and cold, but you think of your horse,” Shangle said. “It gets you out of bed.”

The adoptions are typically held at the ranch. However, they are now being held virtually because of COVID-19 restrictions. The next Online Corral will be 4 p.m. Nov. 3 through 4 p.m. Nov. 10. Applications must be submitted by Nov. 1 to be eligible to place a bid during the event.

Christopher Baker said the approaching adoption is met with mixed feelings.

“There’s satisfaction in seeing how far they’ve come,” he said. “Every little bit of progress they’ve made makes you proud. But it’s hard. You miss them. You’d think it would get easier, but it doesn’t.”

Assessing his horse, Cooter -- short for Bandicoot, the name his 6-year-old son chose – helps him see himself more clearly.

“The process is a journey,” Baker said. “The horses come in and they’re scared to death and wild. Over time, you build a bond with them. Through that, they become your friends.

“It’s the same for us, it’s been a journey. I learned a lot about myself.”

He marvels at the change in them both.

“They’re all wild when they get rounded up and thrown in these pens. They come in biting and kicking and charging you,” Baker said. “They’re locked up, too. We are each other’s ticket to freedom.”

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

To register or to bid on the auction, go to:

<https://wildhorsesonline.blm.gov/Animals>

Check out the horses up for adoption:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCm2_HkkLFCITekHu5Dz kf-A/playlists

For more information, follow the Nevada Department of Corrections on Facebook.

