



There are a handful of Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance-accredited facilities in New York that focus on aftercare

Aftercare to the Front

Several New York outfits help keep
the aftercare movement in stride

BY TERESA GENARO

NEW YORK'S TAKE The Lead Thoroughbred retirement program has placed nearly 1,500 horses in accredited facilities across the state since its founding in 2013. Retiring a horse through Take The Lead couldn't be easier: the program is a division of the New York Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association, and when owners or trainers decide a horse's time on the racetrack has come to an end, they can make one phone call, to president Rick Schosberg or executive director Andy Belfiore to get the process going. Take The Lead does the rest.

Take The Lead networks with a handful of New York facilities that have been accredited by the Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance, and most of the horses that go through Take The Lead are retired to New Vocations Racehorse Adoption and ReRun Thoroughbred Adoption to be retrained for pleasure riding, hunting, jumping, dressage, barrel racing, polo, law enforcement, and therapy.

Horses whose physical limitations prevent them from participating in strenuous physical activity may go to Old Friends at Cabin Creek, where they make new equine and human friends, sharing paddocks and getting spoiled by the farm's frequent visitors.

These programs are the ones that often get the headlines: they get horses whose names are familiar to racing fans, and their social media accounts reach tens of thousands of people. Fundraisers for these groups are visible at racing's biggest events, and their proximity to Saratoga Springs offers them a high profile during the summer racing season.

The New York chapter of New Vocations operates out of Gansevoort's North Country Horses, owned by Amanda Vance. A full-service equine facility that offers lessons and training and holds camps and clinics, North Country also takes in, retrains, and adopts out off-

track Thoroughbreds and Standardbreds for New Vocations.

"I usually have 18 to 24 of them, all at different stages," said Vance. "Some are receiving rehab, some get transitional training, and some are waiting to go to their next home."

Vance grew up in Niskayuna, N.Y., about 30 miles from where she lives now. She began riding lessons when she was 6 years old and quickly became what she calls "a horse-crazy girl" that wanted to spend every minute at the barn—a barn at which trainers were riding and competing on Thoroughbreds.

"Thoroughbreds were completely normal to me," she said. "If you didn't have a Thoroughbred, you weren't part of the 'in crowd,' and then Warmbloods sort of took over."

As she got older, Thoroughbreds became, and remain, her mission.

"As I continued my horse education, I thought the industry was really missing out," she said. "I wanted to continue to highlight Thoroughbreds' athleticism, trainability, and versatility."

Vance's commitment to the breed goes beyond what they can do in the show ring or on the riding trail.

"When I was growing up aftercare wasn't something that we talked about," she reflected. "I didn't even know there was a need for aftercare. Now I make



COURTESY NORTH COUNTRY HORSES

North Country Horses' Amanda Vance with a pair of friends

sure that every kid that walks through my barn knows about it. I try really hard to include them in all aspects of what we and New Vocations do."

North Country Horses was featured at last summer's Aftercare Day at Saratoga Race Course, an event in which retired Thoroughbreds show off their chops in their new career and showcase the breed's versatility. While Bielefeld, a New Vocations alumnus, wasn't much of a racehorse, he now works in Revolutionary War reenactments. Vance also participated in a retirement ceremony that day for Drafted, a multiple graded/group stakes-winning gelding that earned more than \$1 million on the track.

"I'd gotten a call from a repeat adopter who was interested in one of our horses, and I said to her, 'That's not your horse. I know what you're looking for, and I'll call you when I have your horse,'" recalled Vance.

When Drafted arrived at North Country Horses last July, she knew he'd be perfect. The adopter agreed, and when she and her husband learned about the retirement ceremony, they went to the farm to help get him and the other horses ready for Aftercare Day.

"And the next day they brought him home," said Vance. "He'll compete later this year in dressage at the Retired



COURTESY THOROUGHBRED RETIREMENT FOUNDATION

Take The Lead's president, and former trainer, Richard Schosberg

Aftercare to the Front

Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance Accredited Organizations in New York

ACTT Naturally - Greenwich
Valerie Buck, executive director
(570) 578-6377
acttnaturally.org

After the Races NY - Ballston Spa
Anna Hollander, president
(518) 488-7950
aftertheracesny.com

Akindale Thoroughbred Rescue - Pawling
Zazie Pence, executive director
(845) 855-1262
akindale.org

Equine Advocates - Chatham
(518) 392-0175
Susan Wagner, president
equineadvocates.org

Finger Lakes Thoroughbred Adoption Program -
Farmington
(585) 478-4664
Melissa Porter, barn manger
fltap.org

Lollypop Farm, Humane Society of Greater Rochester -
Rochester
(585) 223-1330
Lauren Guerrero, stable manager
lollypop.org

Lucky Orphans Horse Rescue - Dover Plains
(845) 877-0685
Deanna Mancuso, executive director
luckyorphans.org

Rerun Inc. - East Greenbush
(859) 595-6660
Lisa Molloy, executive director
rerunottb.com

Second Chance Thoroughbreds - Spencer
(607) 882-1353
Collette Duddy, executive director
secondchancethoroughbreds.org

Therapeutic Horses of Saratoga - Saratoga Springs
(518) 290-6240
Rachel Hodgson, equine care coordinator
thsaratoga.org

Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation -
Saratoga Springs
(518) 226-0028
Pat Stickney, executive director
trfinc.org



COURTESY LUCKY ORPHANS HORSE RESCUE

Lucky Orphans Horse Rescue advocated for the cause last summer at Saratoga during the track's Aftercare Day

Racehorse Project.”

The TAA has accredited 12 organizations in New York, and those organizations represent the range of services that off-track Thoroughbreds need. Some, like Equine Advocates, Old Friends at Cabin Creek, Lucky Orphans Horse Rescue, and Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation, function primarily as sanctuaries for horses that can't withstand the rigors of a second career. New Vocations, Akindale Thoroughbred Rescue, and ReRun focus on retraining and adopting out horses. Many of them get horses directly from the racetrack, through Take The Lead or directly from owners and trainers.

In 2007, Finger Lakes Thoroughbred Adoption Program broke new ground, literally and figuratively, when construction began on The Purple Haze Center on the grounds of Finger Lakes Racetrack. The first and only adoption program in the country with a retraining facility on the grounds of a racetrack, FLTAP was created through the joint efforts of Finger Lakes Gaming & Racetrack; Delaware North Companies, Finger Lakes' parent company, which donated two acres of land for the Center; and the Horsemen's Benevolent Protection Agency. The Purple Haze Center honors the financial contributions made by Wanda Polisseni and her Purple Haze Stables.

Farm manager Melissa Porter joined FLTAP six years ago, signing on initially—and reluctantly—as a stall cleaner. Raised in the Finger Lakes region, she had grown up around Quarter Horses and had always heard the stories about Thoroughbreds: They're crazy, they're high-strung, they bite. But, homesick after living briefly in Colorado, she came back to New York and needed a job, so she accepted the position at FLTAP.

“Thoroughbreds changed my life,” she said. “After a week I knew I was going to stay.”

Rising through the ranks to trainer and then manager, Porter has also adopted horses from the program, going to the RRP in 2019 with Marakovits, a New York-bred by Giant Surprise that raced 26 times, mostly at Finger Lakes, earning just

under \$60,000.

At the RRP, she placed 22nd out of 87 horses in the competitive trail division, and Porter taught her now 8-year-old daughter to ride on her.

"If you ask my daughter, Mara is her horse," said Porter, using the mare's nickname. "I'm just borrowing her until my daughter outgrows her pony."

Not all of FLTAP's work is quite as joyful. When the system is working perfectly, trainers at Finger Lakes "donate" their horses to FLTAP, generally at the end of the racing season in November. FLTAP, which has stalls for 16 horses, only accepted horses that had raced at Finger Lakes until 2020. But when the pandemic hit and retirements slowed, FLTAP was able to extend their assistance to other horses in need.

"We got a call from a breeder in Delaware and we took some of her broodmares," said Porter. "We just took in a 10-year-old mare named Her Grace that had raced at Finger Lakes and was found with a New York kill buyer."

FLTAP has also rescued Thoroughbreds that are listed at the livestock auction in Unadilla, N.Y., an auction that Porter characterizes as "the worst in the United States" and from which horses are often bought for slaughter.

"We try to focus on helping horses in this region," Porter said.

And while the focus of Take The Lead is on horses that have raced at Saratoga Race Course, Belmont Park, or Aqueduct Racetrack, the organization also steps in to situations like the one that Porter describes.

"Often, horses that end up in bad situations have run at New York Racing Association tracks," said Schosberg. "The NYTHA board, Andy, and I have discretion to help. We want to make sure that we're available to help a horse that's slipping into an unfortunate situation. We can provide networking, we can coordinate haulers, and we can provide funding to make sure that a horse isn't going to get into a worse situation."

Porter recently worked with nearby Lollypop Farm, the Humane Society of Greater Rochester (established 1873) on

a rescue, a not-uncommon occurrence, according to Joanna Dychton, Lollypop's farm director.

"We've worked with FLTAP since they opened," said Dychton. "About 15 years ago, we worked on an animal cruelty case that involved about 15 horses, mostly Thoroughbreds. We were able to take a number of horses, and FLTAP took about half a dozen that had been racehorses."

Lollypop Farm's work goes far beyond horses; their 136-acre facility near Fairport, N.Y., has housed goats, emus, llamas, pigs (both potbellied and farm), and a variety of fowl, and it also has an adoption center for household pets. As part of its contract with the TAA, it's required to house four Thoroughbreds at all times, and Lollypop adopts out about half a dozen horses a year.

The farm partners with the ASPCA Right Horse program, an adoption network whose goal is to "massively increase" horse adoption in the U.S.

"We have a trainer that we contract with," said Dychton, "and if there's a horse that we can take on and hopefully adopt out, we'll take it in, and we can use the ASPCA's Horse Adoption Express to transport it."

As part of their contract with the ASPCA, Lollypop cannot purchase horses from kill buyers or auctions, but they do work with organizations that rescue horses from them.

"We try to get ahead of situations before horses get to that point," Dychton explained.



COGLIANESE PHOTOS/JOE LABOZZETTA

Racing retiree Drafted is being aimed toward a career in dressage

The farm has been accredited for four years, and Dychton learned about the accreditation process from Porter at FLTAP. Lollypop has used some of its TAA grant money to purchase a portable X-ray machine for its equine residents.

"We have a clinic for pets onsite," she said, "but we don't have farm or equine veterinarians. Sometimes we know the history of the horses that come to us, sometimes we know some of the history, and it was really expensive to get X-rays so that we could properly evaluate them and move forward with the horse with more knowledge.

"The TAA grants give us some relief in



COURTESY FINGER LAKES THOROUGHBRED ADOPTION PROGRAM

The Purple Haze Center on the grounds of Finger Lakes Gaming & Racetrack

Aftercare to the Front

our budget, and now we're able to get a better feel for the horses and place them with appropriate adopters."

Lollypop is also constructing a new intake center that will offer a proper quarantine option for horses and is developing a new equine center.

"We like showing that there are jobs that horses can do beyond racing," said Dychton. "They're very athletic and energetic, and if we can give them the opportunity to express that energy, they can focus on the job you want them to do."

Collette Duddy is the executive director of the aptly-named Second Chance Thoroughbreds, located near Spencer, N.Y., south of the Finger Lakes region. A lifelong lover of the breed, she's owned her farm, originally a lesson and boarding facility, for nearly 25 years. When she read the 2011 report of the New York State Gaming Commission's Task Force on Retired Racehorses, she knew she had to take action.

"That report is what helped guide my journey here," she said, referring to the farm's TAA accreditation and rescue/retirement initiatives.

Second Chance's portfolio of activities is expansive. It rescues horses destined for slaughter. It combats overbreeding with its Social Club Initiative Gelding Program, named after the first colt gelded at the farm, hosting gelding clinics and offering limited funds to people in



COURTESY MELISSA PORTER

Finger Lakes Thoroughbred Adoption Program's Melissa Porter

need so that they can castrate a horse. It prioritizes broodmares in need of a safe place to live.

A recent graduate of the Second Chance program is Eye Luv Lulu, a New York-bred stakes winner that earned \$931,174 in 61 starts, primarily on the NYRA circuit. In December 2020, the 9-year-old gelding had been winless for nearly a year, with a record that year of 0-2-2 from six starts and earnings of \$20,375.

Entered for a \$12,500 claiming tag at Aqueduct, the dark bay by Pollard's Vision was claimed by his breeder, Donald Newman, who kept him for three years

before donating him to Second Chance's when the boarding facility at which Eye Luv Lulu had been living closed.

"The Newmans have donated quite a few horses to us over the years," said Duddy, "and Eye Luv Lulu was recently adopted by someone for pleasure riding.

"He was very sound," she continued, "but he didn't have a great canter and he had some behaviors that wouldn't have made him a great show horse. There's nothing physically wrong with him; he's sound and beautiful, and he likes the attention and having something to do."

So far this year, six horses have been adopted from Second Chance, and like Lollypop Farm, Second Chance seldom gets horses straight from the track, often rescuing them from auctions like Unadilla, working with dealer Teddy Adams to get them out of the auction lot. In 2021 Duddy got a call about a 19-year-old Thoroughbred mare, a half sister to Pioneer of the Nile, at the Unadilla auction, and she sprang into action.

"We started to focus on broodmares because there are so many that are falling through the tracks," she said. "Regala Di Trieste had been sold by her breeder to someone who was supposed to take care of her, and that person sold her to a dealer. I'm glad that we were able to buy her."

Regala Di Trieste had nine foals before ending up at the auction, and now she's available for adoption through Second Chance, which describes her as "sound and athletic."

"Broodmares are easy to transition back into training," said Duddy, "because they're so used to being handled. They're ready to become nice riding horses, and we're using her for lessons now."

When a horse arrives at Lucky Orphans Horse Rescue near Dover Plains, N.Y., it's found its forever home. A sanctuary for Thoroughbreds, Lucky Orphans is "committed to the lifelong well-being" of its equine residents, which are part of the organization's programs to support the lifelong well-being of humans, too.

Through services such as equine-assisted psychotherapy and youth



COURTESY LOLLYPOP FARM

The outlook for retired racehorses has improved immeasurably in the last 20 years

development programs, the horses at Lucky Orphans work with military veterans, victims of domestic violence, and people in recovery from substance abuse. Founder and executive director Deanna Mancuso and the Lucky Orphans staff also participate in programs with the Dutchess County Office of Probation and Community Corrections, with local schools, and with services for at-risk young people.

“Because of the programming we do, it’s important that our horses are a consistent population,” Mancuso explained. “Some of our clients are on the spectrum, some are on probation, some are in foster care, some have parents that are incarcerated. They come week after week to see the same horses, and for them, it’s kind of like visiting a friend. For some of our clients, the horses might be the only consistent thing in their lives.”

Because there’s so little turnover at Lucky Orphans—horses stay until the end of their lives—the organization hasn’t been able to take in new horses since 2022. The farm’s total capacity for horses is 50, and 20 of the residents are Thoroughbreds. One of the more recently arrived residents is Woodville (by Ghostzapper), a broodmare that colicked during one of her pregnancies, resulting in surgery that left her with a risky future if she continued to be bred. Her owners Doheny Racing Stable, Off The Hook, and Thomas Coleman donated her to Lucky Orphans. Now 12 and named Athena, she’s a favorite in Lucky Orphans’ youth development program.

“We hack her around the farm, and she loves kids,” said Mancuso. “She’s patient, kind, and gentle.”

Though the outlook for retired racehorses has undeniably improved immeasurably in the last 20 years, the caretakers of those horses nonetheless keep looking forward, seeing ways to expand and improve the work they do and to ameliorate some of the systems already in place.

“I’m amazed sometimes by the number of owners who don’t know about aftercare,” said Vance of North Country Horses. “I’m also amazed that it doesn’t

occur to the people who are attending and enjoying the races. How can we make ‘aftercare’ a common word? How can we give it more visibility within and outside the industry?”

Said FLTAP’s Porter: “We had four horses that had been adopted through our program end up at the Unadilla auction. I got the phone call at home one night, making dinner with my family, and those horses that we work with are like my family. I started to think that maybe I couldn’t do this work anymore. We ended up changing our contracts and adoption agreements to try to prevent that from happening, and I’d love to see more legislative support that would prevent people from breaking contracts and sending horses to livestock auctions.”

“I’d love to see horses get retired earlier and sounder, so that more of them could go on to second careers,” said Second Chance’s Duddy. “I’d also like to stop horses being sold to Puerto Rico to race there,” a sentiment echoed by Schosberg.

Universal on the wish lists of aftercare providers is more land and more money. They all expressed gratitude for TAA accreditation and funding, appreciating both the stamp of legitimacy of the accreditation and the financial relief of the funding, and it is perhaps a testimony to the success of the programs that they are often asked to do more than they can with the resources that they have.



COURTESY LUCKY ORPHANS HORSE RESCUE

Lucky Orphans Horse Rescue’s founder and executive director Deanna Mancuso

Although imperfect, the safety nets for horses in New York State have never been stronger, with a regular stream of financial contributions from virtually every stakeholder in racing. FLTAP and Take The Lead are industry innovators and models for other jurisdictions, and individual organizations provide options for pretty much any kind of horse that comes off the racetrack. The leaders of those organizations know what needs to happen now and what needs to happen next. If the horses of New York are fortunate, the rest of the industry should be listening to them. 🐾



COURTESY LUCKY ORPHANS HORSE RESCUE

More land and more money are on the wish lists of all aftercare providers