





THE BROOKE/MANPREET ROMANA

LIGHTENING THEIR LOAD

THE BROOKE HELPS EASE THE BURDEN
OF WORKING EQUINES

By Rena Baer

In Central Kentucky, people often admire — and sometimes even envy — the sleek Thoroughbreds grazing upon the plentiful bluegrass that defines a region also known for its love, appreciation, and care of horses. Locally, these equines are considered “sport” horses that help earn their living on the racetrack, in the show ring, on the trails, or in the breeding sheds and foaling barns. And, most of these horses are cared for by people who want them healthy and happy.

“We have a huge heart for horses here in Kentucky,” said Cindy Rullman, whose former position promoting the Kentucky Horse Park for eight years puts her in the know.

And Rullman is one of those whose passion for horses cannot be contained. So much so that she has taken on a new mission that surpasses the borders of not only Kentucky but also North America.

Rullman is now raising money from higher-end American donors to support The Brooke. This 80-year-old London-based charity is dedicated to improving the lives of “working” horses, mules, and donkeys in some of the poorest communities in the world by teaching their owners how to care properly for the animals and by offering support in that mission.

Rullman works out of the Bluegrass, where she has found many sympathetic supporters.

“One of the great things about Lexing-

ton is that people here understand horses; they know what a healthy horse looks like,” she said. “When they see our videos and pictures, they can see right away what a problem this is.”

And it is not racing or sport horses the organization works with; it is animals that shoulder heavy loads over rough terrain, from dawn until dusk, day in and day out, their owners depending on them for a living.

The Brooke recently started working in Narok, in Kenya, with the aim of improving the welfare of 20,000 working donkeys.

There, donkeys are used for a variety of domestic and commercial purposes. They transport goods and people by carts, which often injure their chests, shoulders, withers, and spines. Sometimes their injuries are caused by packs on their backs that leave painful tail lesions. Cart donkeys also suffer from hoof-related problems; many

In many poor countries, donkeys such as this one in Uttar Pradesh, India, are indispensable work animals.

have overgrown hooves or abscesses and laminitis. Nearly all are lame. They are often left tied up with no access to food, shelter, or water for hours at a time.

This can lead to wounds caused by the rope rubbing the animals' legs, severely restricting their natural movements and ability to interact with other animals. Farriers offer their services on market days but are unskilled and use unsuitable tools — of the three farriers in Narok, two use machetes to trim the donkeys' hooves, causing severe damage and blood loss.

Another practice involves the use of wire and rope to lead donkeys, which can cause wounds and infection. The Brooke is working with owners to show them correct handling methods. They are donating resources such as first aid and farriery kits; training local service providers to administer quality health care to suffering donkeys; and teaching communities basic animal welfare practices, such as good handling and harnessing practices and husbandry practices, e.g., clean water, food, shelter, and allowing them to rest.

In addition to Kenya, The Brooke operates in communities in Egypt, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Senegal, Jordan, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Ethiopia, reaching 1 million horses, donkeys, and mules worldwide.

The organization has 1,000 employees, most of them working hands-on with the animals and their owners to make changes that not only alleviate immediate suffering but will improve the quality of their lives, both animal and owner.

"We have many vets out every day, working with these animals and simultaneously teaching owners to take better care of them," said Rullman. "Most of these working animals are in chronic



This carriage horse is used to transport tourists in Petra, Jordan.

THE BROOKE / MARTIN USBORNE



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THE BROOKE

"I'm an animal lover," she said. "But, I was completely unaware of the plight of working animals around the world. The scope and breadth of what they were doing and the huge number of animals they were reaching and alleviating their suffering touched me."

She said she also was attracted to the fact that The Brooke helps people, as well, by teaching them proper care of their work animals, which in turn serves them in earning a livelihood.

"There's always that tension there between wanting to give to organizations that help animals and organizations that help people," Rullman said. "This is one of the few organizations in the world that does both."

The more familiar she became with The Brooke the more she said she saw the immediacy of its work being combined with a worldwide vision.



A donkey in Pakistan is exhausted by its heavy load.



THE BROOKE

The Brooke veterinarian Rab Nawaz takes the temperature of a horse in Pakistan suffering from heat exhaustion.

"They really look to the future without losing sight of this being about the individual animal," she said. "They strike that wonderful balance."

Rullman was so impressed with The Brooke she contacted the organization and asked if she could hold a fundraiser in Lexington. One thing led to another, and Rullman found herself in England at The Brooke's London office for several weeks, learning about its operations.

"Sometimes, an agency or organization looks wonderful from the outside, but once you get inside you learn it's not quite what it seemed," she said. "But, it was just the opposite at The Brooke."

As it also worked out, the president of The Brooke had set a goal to double the number of animals reached worldwide to 2 million by 2016, which also meant expanding its fundraising efforts and developing new partners. "They decided to come to the United States, which has the reputation of being generous," said Rullman.

Rullman underwent a grueling group interview toward the end of her stay for her current position, and despite what she described as an awful showing on her part due to an overactive case of nerves, she was offered the job.

"It's been rewarding beyond my dreams," she said. "I'm very proud to work with an organization with such integrity and compassion." **KM**

For more information, contact American Friends of the Brooke: www.TheBrookeUSA.org or contact Cindy.Rullman@TheBrookeUSA.org






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