

Remarks by Acting Commissioner Anthony J. Annucci
30th Anniversary Celebration
Wallkill Correctional Facility Second Chances Farm
June 19, 2014

In my capacity as Acting Commissioner, I am delighted with this program and what it has meant over the years, both for the resident Thoroughbreds and their inmate caretakers. And on a personal level, I have a special affection for this program because I too take care of horses. My wife and I presently have four equines in our barn.

Caring for horses is an acquired taste. At first, it is very intimidating. But gradually, you learn how to handle a horse. You learn to be patient and to respect the animal. You learn its likes and dislikes, and ultimately, to be in control in a positive way, even though the horse is so much bigger than you. Caring for horses can be a very calming, soothing and therapeutic activity – one that also allows the person to gain insight and perspective about themselves.

Horses are incredible animals, they can be powerful and fast, but also in some ways, they are delicate, and they definitely need a lot of TLC.

Everyone remembers the movie Seabiscuit. It centered around an undersized and overlooked thoroughbred race horse, whose unexpected successes made him a hugely popular media sensation in the United States during the Great Depression. The story line focused primarily upon three people: jockey, Red Pollard, played by Tobey Maguire, owner, Charles Howard, played by Jeff Bridges, and Horse Trainer Tom Smith, played by Chris Cooper.

Smith is a kindly horse trainer and a drifter. Early in the movie there is a scene when there are several men surrounding a horse, which is extremely agitated and strongly resisting all efforts to control it. One of the men out of anger says get me my gun so I can kill this horse here and now. From the background Smith emerges and says: I will take him. And so the man spares the horse and lets Smith take him.

Later that night, Charles Howard visits Smith at his camp site, introduces himself, and strikes up a conversation. He mentions the fact that Smith came to the rescue of this very troubled horse, which is something quite out of the ordinary.

Smith, in an almost matter of fact manner states:

YOU DON'T THROW A WHOLE LIFE AWAY JUST CAUSE IT'S BANGED UP A LITTLE BIT.

To me, this very simple but profound statement succinctly sums up what this program, Second Chances, is whole about. For thirty years now, the lives of something like 400 Thoroughbred racehorses, have not been thrown away despite being a little banged up, or despite being past their prime and no longer able to race for the entertainment of people. Instead, rather than being abused, neglected or abandoned, or worse, possibly sold to be slaughtered for meat, a practice which I consider to be disgraceful, these horses are instead allowed to live out their lives in a caring and loving environment, until nature decides their time is up.

I am very proud of this program and I am very appreciative of the efforts of all of the staff and all of the inmates here at Wallkill, who over the years, have helped to provide a safe and humanitarian home for these beautiful and deserving animals.