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Retired racehorses get makeovers from USC Equestrian Team

Renee Standera

Retired racehorses awaiting adoption at Wateree River Correctional Institution look a little more appealing to potential adopters thanks to the University of South Carolina Equestrian Team.

On a Saturday morning while most young people their age are in bed, or still awake from the night before, the team was at the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation's Seabiscuit Stables behind the fence at the minimum-security correctional facility.

"We're thrilled to have them," said William Cox with the TRF of South Carolina. "These girls have volunteered their Saturday morning to come out, pull manes, bathe the horses, make them look like the Thoroughbreds that they are...The people that adopt a Thoroughbred want a horse that looks like a Thoroughbred, not just a horse that's been out in the pasture a long time."

The women bathed and groomed the horses to get them ready for their adoption photos and videos. By the time they were done, they looked as sleek and shiny as the horses you see in the Kentucky Derby.

"I think it's a great opportunity for them to come in and give horses that are given the opportunity to have a second chance, that they're able to get these horses looking a little better by using their expertise in grooming them," said Equestrian Team Coach Boo Major.

[The horses are cared for by inmates participating in the Second Chances program at the farm.](#) But since most of the women have been around horses all their lives, they know more about working with horses than the inmates do.

"We really liked all the horses here," Major said. "We were really impressed with how well they've been taken care of and they've obviously been worked with a lot and they're very nice, calm, gentle horses. I was pleasantly surprised to see what great shape they are in, how wonderful the inmates are with them...it's been great to see how much the inmates are learning through this program."

The team was so enthusiastic, they not only asked if they could return for another day, but some asked if they could adopt some of the horses.

"They've asked a couple of times if we could take a couple of them home to be our mascot, but unfortunately our barn is full," Major said.

"We were thrilled to come out," said senior Bailey Mierzejewski. "I'm really glad they invited us to come out...if we can be any part of a horse finding a new home, we are definitely glad to be a part of

that."

"I think they really felt it was rewarding and they were doing something that, you know, is really helping some animals, which is something this group really likes to do," said Major.

Cox was grateful for the team's help.

"This wouldn't have happened without them and I cannot thank them enough," he said.

Now he and the TRF will continue to find homes for the horses that can be adopted. Others cannot be adopted and will spend the rest of their days on the farm.

[WEB EXTRA: Click here to read the success stories of three horses from the Second Chances program.](#)

"These horses are all survivors. They've all been saved from a life of who knows what," Cox said. "They finished their racing careers. Some of them weren't any good. Some of them were very good. But if we don't rescue these horses and allow them to be adopted out for other purposes, other uses to second homes, there's no telling where they could end up. They could be in a much less desirable situation."

Since 2011, TRF of South Carolina has found homes for 25 horses.

The University of South Carolina Equestrian Team opens its season hosting Baylor Friday. [Click here for more details.](#)

[Click here for more information about the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation of South Carolina](#) or call 803-243-0034. [Click here for a link to the TRF SC Facebook page.](#)

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