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Exclusively for members of the National Association for Female Executives



By Jennifer Pellet

WORKING  
woman

## The Horse Rescuer

Nancy Van Wie chunked it all to live in a place she loved. Eight years later she's working to save the environment—and equine lives.

**W**ell into a successful marketing career and living on the north shore of Massachusetts, Nancy Van Wie suddenly realized she was in the wrong place doing the wrong thing. "Every year, I would spend my vacation in the Adirondacks, where I grew up," she recounts. "Finally, after eight years in the city, I thought, why am I enjoying two weeks a year in the place I love instead of living there?"

Rewarding as it was, her work in the nonprofit and corporate sectors had lured her away from life-long passions: environmental conservation, the Adirondack Park, and horses. "A friend said, 'Go to where it is you want to be and life will work out for you,'" says the 40-year-old, who soon did exactly that—quitting her job, packing up her truck, and heading back home with Gingo, the pony she had owned since childhood, in tow. "I came back jobless and homeless," she laughs.

Fortunately, the advice proved apt, and Van Wie was able to fund graduate school by waitressing. In 1996, armed with a master's in business administration from the State University of New York at Albany as well as her 1986 environmental science degree from the University of Vermont, she embarked on a new career.

Van Wie soon landed a job with

the Silver Bay Association, a nonprofit conference and training center affiliated with the YMCA and located near scenic Lake George within the Adirondack Park. Working within more than 100,000 acres of forested woodlands enabled Van Wie to return to another favorite pastime—one inspired by a short-lived post-college job at a thoroughbred breeding farm. "Three of the five horses I worked with back then had injuries that would have destroyed them if they raced," she explains. "But if tended to and given a lighter duty role, they would have been fine."

Despite this grim reality, the horses were eventually sold as racehorses—and Van Wie increasingly found her compassion for her equine charges at odds with her employer's business interests. "At one point the person I worked for told me, 'You can't save them all,'" she says. "And I thought, 'Well, I can sure try.'" So Van Wie left the horse breeding business—and the business side of the horse world—and began rehabilitating injured and mistreated horses and placing them in new homes in her spare time.



Horses outnumbered human guests at the farm wedding of Crane Mountain Valley Horse Rescue cofounders Nancy Van Wie and Eddie Mrozik.

### Bringing Back Beau

After moving back to the Adirondacks from Massachusetts, she soon found a horse in need of her help. And, as storybook as it sounds, the horse, in turn, led Van Wie to love.

"I acquired a four-year-old mare named Poesy as a rescue project at around the same time as Silver Bay hired a restoration specialist to replace the roof of their 100-year-old inn," explains Van Wie. A copper craftsman whose credits include work on the Statue of Liberty, Eddie Mrozik also turned out to have a passion for horse rehabilitation on a par with her own.





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"He shares my belief that horses have a sixth sense," explains Van Wie, who enlisted Mrozik in rehabilitating Poesy. "He rehabilitated her—and I met my best friend and soul mate."

Over time, the couple expanded their horse rescuing activities. "We wanted to help more than one horse at a time," says Van Wie. "As many as 100,000 horses are commercially slaughtered every year in the U.S., and many more die inhumanely from cruelty or lack of knowledge about proper care."

In May of 2002, Van Wie and Mrozik purchased a 23-acre farm, founded the nonprofit Crane Mountain Valley Horse Rescue ([www.cmvhr.org](http://www.cmvhr.org)), and began taking in abused, neglected, abandoned, and slaughter-bound horses. Funded by donations, the shelter provides emotional and physical rehabilitation to its charges until they can be placed in qualified homes.

That same year, Van Wie was offered her dream job—director of philanthropy at the Adirondack Nature Conservancy. Soon, she was dividing her time between raising funds for the Conservancy to further its land conservation efforts and running the CMVHR with Mrozik.

### Horse Haven

"Racehorses come to us for a variety of reasons," says Van Wie. "Some are either injured or not fast enough and get donated by owners who want to do the right thing, others we actually rescue by buying them at a slaughterhouse auction. With proper care and treatment, these are all animals who will make great pleasure, trail, or show horses."

But caring for and rehabilitating horses is both difficult and expensive. New arrivals require approximately \$500 worth of care per month for the

first three to four months of the CMVHR program. "People don't always realize that horses need proper nutrition, their teeth and hooves maintained, and regular deworming—and that's in addition to any special care, such as orthopedic shoes



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or medical attention they may need," explains Van Wie.

Three years ago, CMVHR rehabilitated a one-year-old named Cheyenne with internal injuries from being bred when she was far too young. "The owners kept her to give the baby milk and then threw her away because she could never be bred again," explains Van Wie. "Through a two-part, \$4,000 surgery we were able to put her back together again. Cheyenne was placed in a new home, and she's now doing fabulously as a riding horse."

To ensure that horses like Cheyenne are properly cared for, the CMVHR developed a strict adoption process, including an application, interview, and a site visit to the poten-



tial home. "We can also tell a lot by watching potential owners work with the animal, because horses are very intuitive about people," says Van Wie, who notes that CMVHR retains ownership of adoptees for two years so "we can take them back if necessary."

Adoptive owners also pay a fee, from \$300 to \$1,500 depending on the age and capability of the horse. "The fees never recover our costs, but they help support the farm," says Van Wie, who is in the process of relocating the CMVHR to a 43-acre farm in Westport, New York, which will raise its capacity from 15 to 25 horses—and reduce Van Wie's work commute by two hours.

In addition to rescuing horses, the shelter runs an educational program geared toward preventing the abuse and neglect of horses. "We offer hoof care, nutrition, and horsemanship clinics that draw people from up to 300 miles away," says Van Wie. "We run free field trips for local schools and news organizations to educate people on the magnificence of horses and the effects of cruelty and abuse."

Van Wie's full-time job plus approximately 30 hours a week on volunteer efforts ranging from horse care and training to grant writing and adoption processing leaves little downtime. In fact, CMVHR's cofounders—who were married in April of 2004—haven't had a vacation since they opened the farm. "There are no holidays and no sick days," says Van Wie. "Whether it's raining or 50 degrees below zero horses have to be fed and cared for."

But she doesn't regret a minute of her dual role. "I'm spending my days working to protect the two things in life I love the most—the Adirondack Park and horses. I feel very lucky." ■



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