

Award motivates horse rescue founder

Morgan Silver was honored earlier this month for her dedication to horses in need.



Morgan Silver, executive director of the Horse Protection Association of Florida, feeds four of the seven horses at a quarantine farm in northwest Marion County on Dec. 3, 2009. The United States Equine Federation recently honored Silver for her work caring for horses at her rescue association.

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Morgan Silver usually starts her day at 4 a.m., helping care for the 76 horses currently at the rescue association she helped establish almost 22 years ago.

It's hard, often dirty, work. Silver recently was honored for that work during a glamorous ceremony hosted by the United States Equine Federation, the national governing body of equestrian sport.

On Jan. 14, during the USEF's Pegasus Awards ceremony in Cincinnati, Silver was presented with the Marty Simensen Award, which recognizes people who have shown a commitment to the protection and welfare of horses.

Simensen, who is deceased, was a veterinarian. The USEF website states that the award must be presented to an individual who has demonstrated "an unwavering commitment to the protection and welfare of horses over a period of many years and/or have saved equines through an act of courage and resolve during a crisis situation."

“I was quite shocked,” Silver said. “To be recognized from a national pool of people submitted by horsemen is phenomenal. It's quite an honor.”

Silver established the Horse Protection Association of Florida in 1990 in South Florida and later relocated to northwest Marion County, near Shiloh, in 2001.

“It was my first day off since last May. It was a wonderful break,” she said of attending the prestigious event. “I had to go shopping. I didn't have a dress for that type of occasion. I got to sleep in until 9:30 in the morning. It was surreal.”

Silver was nominated by Cecile Dunn, who owns Dunn Haven Farm in Lady Lake. Dunn also is a USEF board member.

“It came to my mind that Morgan would be an excellent person to receive that award,” Dunn said. “When she was selected, I was delighted.”

While the personal recognition was nice, along with the award itself — a silver bowl and brass mortar and pestle — Silver soon was back at the association's 150-acre farm, trying to figure out how to keep the rescue going.

“It is the most trying time I've ever been in,” Silver said. “The economy finally hit us. Our donations were down 50 percent through the year, and dropped even more drastically from August.”

In December, the organization only had enough money to make it through the month, before it received a few more donations.

“We're on a month-to-month existence right now. We're trying to get the number of horses down,” Silver said.

At one point, the rescue had nearly 120 horses. By adopting horses to new homes, the organization is down to 76 animals and it is only taking in horses that are victims of animal cruelty.

“Luckily, there are not that many cruelty cases. It's mostly owners who are losing their house or job and have run out of resources,” she said.

Despite the struggles, Silver hopes to celebrate the association's 22nd anniversary in April.

“When I got started in this, I had grandiose ideas about dealing mostly with prevention and education. Little did I know things would get so bad,” she said.