



Animal lovers struggle to provide aid in down economy

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By **Michael Dumas, Press-Register**

VANCLEAVE, Mississippi -- In a down economy, signs of struggle can pop up nearly everywhere, and in Jackson County, those signs are becoming more and more visible in rural pastures and farmlands.

So says Neeva Bailey, who heads the Animal Protection and Education Association in Vanclave.

For more than a decade, Bailey has used her 26 acres of land to care for animals in need, such as dogs, cats and horses. And it's with those larger, majestic animals where issues are arising.

Bailey said she's taken in 35 horses over the last few years, and as many as 20 in the last year alone -- most of them because their owners just couldn't afford to feed them. On an average year, she said, she takes in about four horses.

And now, even though she keeps more than a dozen of the horses at a separate 30-acre pasture, Bailey has run out of room.

"With the economy being so bad, every day we're getting more and more calls from people who can't take care of their horses," Bailey said. "And there's nowhere to put them; we're past full."

Bailey has incurred a majority of the costs associated with caring for so many large animals, thanks in part to co-ownership in a telecommunications business subcontracting with Northrop Grumman in Pascagoula. But now, the veterinarian bills are piling up right alongside the costs of feed and farriers, and Bailey has been left praying for relief, right alongside the families she's trying to help.



Courtesy Neeva Bailey

This horse was rescued as part of a raid in Jones County on Nov. 8, 2010, and delivered to the Animal Protection and Education Association in Vanclave. Neeva Bailey, head of the association, said she now has no more room to care for such animals.

"You name it, we've got a grocery list going," Bailey said.

She said she's been able to find qualified homes to adopt several horses, but the horses keep coming in faster than new homes come available.

"Right now, it seems like every corner you go around, there's another pasture with horses in it that the people cannot afford to feed and take care of," Bailey said.

They aren't just coming from individuals, however. Bailey said that on Monday she received two from a raid in Jones County.

Another challenge is knowing just what kind of shape the horses are in when she gets them. Some are obviously malnourished, with thin legs and exposed rib cages, but depending on how long the horse has been wanting, it might be so weak that the animal must be euthanized.

"With some, it's too late," Bailey said. "There's nothing you can do, the damage is already done. It's really heartbreaking."

At this point, Bailey said she's just hoping for donations and for qualified families with good land to help ease the load, because the thought of turning down a horse needing her help is almost too much to bear.

"I pray a lot that it's not going to happen," she said.

For more information about adoption, donation and the Animal Protection and Education Association, visit **www.animalprotectionms.com** or call Neeva Bailey at 228-990-6776.

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