

# Saratoga Warhorse Welcomes 600th Participant

by Marti Healy

for Saratoga TODAY

It seems like no small coincidence that the current average size of a combat battalion is 600 soldiers. And that the historic Charge of the Light Brigade involved 600 warriors, along with their horses, riding into the very “mouth of Hell,” per Tennyson. And that now, 600 military veterans have come back from the gaping brink of another kind of hell – once again, with the unfailing loyalty of horses at their sides.

On February 9, the 600th military veteran participated in the Saratoga WarHorse program. It took place at the Aiken, South Carolina location.

These modern-day 600 have survived personal battles and unseen wounds as horrific and heroic as any in history. And with one more surge of raw personal courage – scraped from somewhere deep within themselves – they have come to the Saratoga WarHorse program at one of its two locations: Saratoga Springs, New York or Aiken.

Through this unique program, military veterans who are suffering with devastating yet invisible injuries and brokenness, such as PTSD and TBI, can address the healing process without more pills or lengthy therapies; there is no placating or putting off with this organization.

Through the Saratoga WarHorse program, participants immediately interact

with other veterans who have been exactly where they are right now – peer-to-peer, boot-to-boot. And they experience an individual encounter – a purpose-designed, experiential connection – with off-the-track thoroughbred racehorses who have also known strikingly similar life challenges, pain and struggles.

The Aiken site for the Saratoga WarHorse experience is on the property of Aiken Equine Rescue. There are specially built spaces here, both inside and out, that are dedicated specifically to this program. It incorporates horses that are sanctuaried onsite and fostered by the Rescue. And all of it is provided to the program completely free of charge.

The day when the class was held that included the 600th participant, it was bright with cold and sun. The wind rattled windows and whipped over the hills rolling up to the outdoor round pen where the horse encounters took place. Fittingly, the veterans in this class represented those carrying long-term scars from long-ago wars, as well as those freshly damaged, and included both men and women. Equally appropriate, some of the horses were new to the program, others were experienced; and they brought their own anxious insecurities as well as courage and empathy to the process. In the end, there was grace and trust and profound bonding experienced by each of the participants.



Photo provided.

Although February 9 witnessed a remarkable achievement in the meaningful number of lives now touched by the Saratoga WarHorse program, each veteran is intentionally and unfailingly brought into it one at a time. Each person – and each experience – is singular and individual and unique.

It seems as if the communities of Saratoga Springs,

New York, and Aiken, South Carolina always remember that integral part of the program. Perhaps that is why the critical local support is so strong and generous in these small towns that are so notably similar in their character and culture. To the people of Saratoga Springs and Aiken, the nobility of the individual is never forgotten. Even when there are 600 of them.

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