

NEW MEXICO'S LEADING NEWS SOURCE

# THE SUNDAY JOURNAL

ESTABLISHED 1880  
ABQJOURNAL.COM \$3.00

JULY 30, 2023 •



## FROM THE NEWSROOM

**NEW MEXICANS** planning to give up tobacco or nicotine may have more trouble finding help this summer. **A1**

**CIRCLING BACK:** Horses rescued from illness, injury, abuse and circumstance are prepared for a better life. **A1**

**BERNALILLO COUNTY** Sheriff John Allen, off-duty, takes down a shoplifting suspect on the West Side. **A3**

**STATE POLICE:** A father and his teenage son are facing charges after the boy used his dad's gun to kill a girl in Questa. **A3**

**CONGRESS HAS APPROVED** two measures to undo federal protections for the lesser prairie chicken and northern long-eared bat — endangered animals that have seen their populations plummet over the years. **A4**

## HEALTH

**A GENE THERAPY** delivered through eyedrops is allowing Antonio Vento Carvajal, who has been blind for much of his 14 years, to see again and has opened the door to similar therapies that could potentially treat millions of people. **A10**

## FETCH

**500 GOLDEN RETRIEVERS** met in the motherland to celebrate the first litter of golden retrievers, born in Scotland 155 years ago. Festivities included a tea party and tug-of-war. **A11**

## LIFE IN NM

**THE "FINDING ADVENTURE"** travel series spotlights the inspiring story of an Albuquerque resident. **D1**

## GO!

**READY TO SET SAIL:** The Elephant Butte Balloon Regatta will feature more than 25 balloons in 42nd year. **D6**

## OPINION

**THE REVIVED SOCCER STADIUM** proposal has great potential, if the city can answer lingering questions. **C1**

## SPORTS

**ALBUQUERQUE'S ROADRUNNER LITTLE LEAGUE** all-star baseball team continues its historic push to regionals this week in Texas. **B1**

## NATION/WORLD

**THE HISTORIC HEATWAVE** that's gripped the Southwest throughout July is beginning to abate with the late arrival of monsoon rains. **A2**



EDDIE MOORE / JOURNAL

Larry Smyth, a horse trainer and executive director of Walkin N Circles Ranch, has a nose-to-nose visit with Armando, a rescue horse. The ranch reports it has rescued 500 horses since it was founded in 2002.

# Circling BACK

## Rescue ranch prepares horses for a better life



There are about 40 rescue horses at Walkin N Circles Ranch now. Most will be adopted out for riding, or pulling carts or as companion animals. And some are not the least bit shy about getting their pictures taken.

BY OLLIE REED JR.  
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

**S**TANLEY — Armando, a buckskin gelding, 2- to 3-years-old, is stirring up plenty of dust as trainer Colton Smyth puts the young horse through his paces in a covered round pen at Walkin N Circles Ranch.

It's a recent dry afternoon, the temperature stretching into the high 90s, at Walkin N Circles, a 30-acre horse-rescue operation in this small community about 40 driving miles east of Albuquerque. Since its founding in 2002, the ranch reports, it has saved more than 500 horses put at risk by illness, injury, abuse, abandonment and difficult situations.

"Some of our horses are surrendered to us by owners who can no longer take care of them," said Larry Smyth, 67, Walkin N Circles executive director and father of trainer Colton. "But a lot of horses have been abused and have psychological scars."

He said Armando and another horse, named Brave, were found by the New Mexico Livestock Board, abandoned on property not far from Walkin N Circles. "Brave was down and Armando would not leave him," Larry said. "We picked up Brave and loaded him on a trailer. That's how we got Armando on the trailer."

Both horses had West Nile virus. Brave was not expected to survive his first night at Walkin N Circles, but he did and has since been adopted.

Larry said Walkin N Circles' mission is to do what's best for the horses it rescues. But the ranch is not a horse sanctuary. Its goal is to rehabilitate, retrain and adopt out as many horses as possible, to give the horses a chance at a new, safer, healthier and more content life. According to Walkin N Circles, the ranch rescued 35 horses last year and found adoptive homes for 22 of those.

Armando, however, is an exception. He is not up for adoption.

"We are trying to make him into an all-around training horse," Larry said. "We are going to keep him around as a mascot, use him for parades and shows

See **RANCH** >> **A6**

## Anti-nicotine services disrupted as funding dries up



EDDIE MOORE / JOURNAL

A woman smokes a cigarette Tuesday outside a state building in Santa Fe. The state of New Mexico halted funding to some anti-tobacco groups this year after settlement revenue failed to reach expected levels.

*Issue underscores shortcomings in how NM pays for its efforts*

BY DAN MCKAY  
JOURNAL CAPITOL BUREAU

**SANTA FE** — Quitting is never easy.

But New Mexicans planning to give up tobacco or nicotine may have more trouble finding help this summer.

The state's contract for the 1-800-QUIT-NOW line ended June 30, and it wasn't accepting new clients this month.

Earlier this year, meanwhile, the state Department of Health abruptly canceled about \$741,000 in funding to groups that help people quit smoking — or never start — after revenue from a settlement fund failed to reach expectations.

The disruption in funding underscores longstanding shortcomings in how New Mexico pays for much of its anti-nicotine efforts.

Legal settlements with tobacco companies provide funding. But the state has failed to grow an endow-

ment-like permanent fund as planned, leaving New Mexico with a less-stable funding stream for nicotine prevention.

This year's cuts are drawing renewed attention from legislators who say the explosion in vaping among young people makes it all the more important to spend on prevention.

"It's absolutely critical these programs have continuity," state Rep. Joanne Ferrary, D-Las Cruces, said

See **FUNDING** >> **A8**



Walkin N Circles Ranch trainers Colton Smyth, left, and Rachelle Clifford attempt to introduce reluctant rescue horse Armando to a cart.

EDDIE MOORE / JOURNAL

**RANCH >>**

From PAGE A1

and stuff like that.” Colton, 22, selected Armando for that role because the buckskin is young and built beautifully and because Colton admires the loyalty and courage Armando showed in staying with Brave when that horse was unable to move. On this day, Colton intends to introduce Armando to the horse-drawn cart.

“Carts are becoming popular with people who can no longer get up on a horse,” Larry said.

**Coming out party**

On Saturday, Aug. 5, Walkin N Circles will show 14 horses ready for adoption during an Adopt-A-Thon and Festival at the Bernalillo County Sheriff’s Posse Arena, 10308 Second NW. The event will include music, vendors and food trucks, but its primary purpose is to introduce rescue horses to people looking to make a home for such animals. Horses such as Bryce, Gilly, Kenia, Prancer, Vixen and Wynonna will team up with Walkin N Circles volunteers to show off their skills in round-pen and obstacle course competition.

“The volunteers and their horses will be competing against each other,” said Lauri Michael, Walkin N Circles Ranch board president.

“Winning volunteers will get belt buckles.” Winning horses may be looking at a little extra feed. Horses that win and those that don’t can count on affection and reassurance.

Known officially as New Mexico Horse Rescue at Walkin N Circles Ranch, the operation is licensed, regulated and inspected yearly by the New Mexico Livestock Board. There are about 40 rescue horses at the ranch now. More than a dozen others, including some former rescue horses, are boarded there.

Boarding fees help pay the bills for the ranch, a nonprofit organization that gets no government funding. Money also comes from donors, sponsors, legacy gifts, endowments, trusts and grants as well as from the ranch’s thrift store in Edgewood.

“Forty percent of our income is from the thrift store,” Larry said. Adoption fees, which usually range from \$800 to \$1,000, also go toward the care and feeding of horses, pay for the ranch’s two full-time and seven part-time staff members and the maintenance and improvement of facilities.

During Saturday’s Adopt-A-Thon, Board President Michael himself will be competing with Gilly, 5, 14.3 hands, a paint mare that was found alone in Chaves County.

“She is a contradiction,” Michael said of Gilly. “She likes attention and to be loved, but she is a little stubborn. I am working to get her to be a little bit more accommodating.”

All the horses at the Adopt-A-Thon are available for adoption,



Sandia Wood, a volunteer trainer at Walkin N Circles Ranch, shares some time with Raven, one of the rescue horses that will be part of Saturday’s Adopt-A-Thon.

“WE WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO RUN OUR OPERATION WITHOUT VOLUNTEERS.”

LAURI MICHAEL  
WALKIN N CIRCLES RANCH BOARD PRESIDENT

”

**Horse tales**

Walkin N Circles’ horses can be adopted out for different purposes. Some make excellent riding horses. Others may be better suited to serve as companion animals for horses, or for the humans who adopted them.

Bryce, one of the horses available for adoption, is 15 years old, 14.3 hands tall and has a distinctive star stripe on her forehead. She was pregnant when she arrived at Walkin N Circles in 2019 and gave birth to a foal that was named Denali.

Larry said Bryce was scared when she got to the ranch but is calm and quiet now. She leads well and loads into a trailer with no problem.

“We have had a saddle on her, but we have not ridden her

yet,” Larry said. “She is going to make someone a nice horse.”

Vixen, 3, 13.3 hands tall, is a white filly with a pink patch on her nose. She and two colts were found abandoned during the Christmas season last year, which is why she is named for one of Santa’s reindeer. Her colt companions were tagged Dasher and Prancer. All three will be at Saturday’s Adopt-A-Thon. Walkin N Circles staff members say Vixen demands a lot of attention, but is otherwise well-mannered.

Kenia, 15, 14 hands, was part of a large band abandoned near Cuba in 2020. Like Bryce, Kenia has a star stripe on her forehead, and like Bryce, she was with foal when she arrived at Walkin N Circles. She gave birth to a filly in 2021.

“She was as wild as a March hare,” Larry said of Kenia. “We couldn’t work with her until after she foaled.”

Kenia, now ready to be adopted, is a fast learner and a few years at the ranch have helped her build trust in humans. Even so, she is full of personality, is often cautious around new people and has a stubborn streak, which means she needs a human who is gentle but firm.

And then there is Scully, age unknown, a beautiful bay mare found alone near Tucumcari in 2021. She had a vicious head wound in which the hide was peeled back from her head.

“You could literally see her skull,” Larry said.

Scully carries marks from her awful injury on her forehead and scars from her traumatic experience deep within her. Whatever horrible thing happened to her has left her understandably skittish and unsuitable for adoption at this point. The ranch’s staff has been working her lightly in round pens, trying to help her build trust and confidence. For now, however, she eats calmly from a hay bag attached to a pole fence until humans approach. Then

**If you go**

**WHAT:** Walkin N Circles Ranch Adopt-A-Thon and Festival, featuring 14 adoptable rescue horses teamed with volunteers to take part in round-pen and obstacle-course competition. Also country music, food trucks, vendors, silent auction and a horse-training demonstration.

**WHEN:** 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 5.

**WHERE:** Bernalillo County Sheriff’s Posse Arena, 10308 Second NW.

**ADMISSION:** Free

**WHAT ELSE:** Go to [wncr.org](http://wncr.org) for more information about Walkin N Circles Ranch, ways to donate, volunteer opportunities, the ranch thrift store and more.

she retreats to a safe distance and waits for them to leave.

**Like a rodeo**

Michael said there are 50 regular volunteers and another 50 semi-regulars at Walkin N Circles.

“We would not be able to run our operation without volunteers,” she said.

Some volunteers want to be with horses as much as possible, and the ranch offers several levels of training which range from preparing volunteers to muck stalls, feed and water horses up to handling more difficult horses in round pens.

“But we also have volunteers who don’t want to work with horses,” Michael said. “They help with maintenance and groundskeeping and work at the thrift store.”

Both Michael, who grew up raising and showing horses in Indiana, and Larry Smyth, who was born on a New Mexico ranch, started as volunteers at Walkin N Circles. Larry, who has been a working cowboy, began training horses in 1974 and has worked with horses in Colorado, Texas and Oklahoma as well as New Mexico. He was with the Albuquerque Police Department from 1986 to 2022, working patrol, gangs, metro, traffic and with APD’s mounted patrol. He still trains APD’s horses.

“Horses learn from the release of pressure, not the addition of pressure,” he said. “That’s pretty much our mantra (at Walkin N Circles). Suggest, ask, tell.”

Larry’s son, Colton, thought he had that all figured out as he got Armando hooked into the cart. But no such luck. “Turns out Armando did not see cart pulling as a popular trend.”

“He broke up like a rodeo horse and drug that cart all around the round pen,” Colton said. “That was actually a good representation of how you can do every thing right with a horse and still have a blowup. They are living, breathing animals, not machines. You can’t just push a button. It takes a lot of time and a lot of patience.”



Scully, found alone near Tucumcari in 2021, suffered a head wound so severe her skull was exposed. Walkin N Circles personnel are trying to help the beautiful bay overcome her trauma so that she can be adopted.