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## Veronica Stickney: Couple's reward is seeing horses, dogs thrive

Genea and Bill Stoops have 12 horses at their 10-acre Glenwood, Iowa, home-turned-animal shelter.

It's a rugrat group.

Two are blind, one from being beaten. One has rectal cancer. Two have broken pelvises. Another was beaten so badly it is, in Genea's words, 2,000 pounds of fear.

And you can't adopt that.

But you can love it.

Bill and Genea (pronounced "Gina") have plenty of that to go around. The couple moved from Omaha, where both grew up, to rural Glenwood a little more than three years ago with one goal in mind: Create a place to rehabilitate abused, starved, neglected and unwanted horses and large-breed dogs.

Three years later, they've worked with roughly 200 animals at their shelter, Hooves & Paws Rescue.

"We spend a lot of time with these animals, every single night," she said. "It's a huge amount of work. Some days when you're unloading 300 to 400 bales of hay into the barn, we look at each other and go, 'What are we doing?'

"But it's way worth it."

The Stoopses, married for nearly 25 years, both work full-time jobs. Genea, 51, is an accountant at Carmody Plumbing. Bill, 49, is a manager at the PepsiCo bottling plant.

That leaves evenings and weekends to care for the animals.

In addition to the 12 horses at Hooves & Paws Rescue, the Stoopses have 49 others in foster homes. They also have 11 large-breed dogs - Saint Bernards, chows, a Rottweiler, a mastiff, a bulldog and a cattle dog that was thrown out at a truck stop - at the shelter. Eighteen more dogs are in foster homes.

The couple help animals in trouble outside of Nebraska and Iowa, too. Sometimes, for example, a sheriff will call with information on neglected, abandoned horses that need homes. Genea gets to work.

Lately, the economy has only made her busier.

In the first two weeks of this year, she has fielded nearly 30 phone calls from people who can no longer afford to care for their animals or who need help buying dog food or a doghouse.

Even if the rescue is out of room or money, Genea said, she does what she can to not turn folks away.

The nonprofit organization relies solely on donations. What donations don't cover, the Stoopses pay for themselves.

In warmer months, families and youth groups often stop by on weekends to volunteer. They'll brush the horses or help clean, among other chores.

On Friday evenings and Sundays, Genea gives riding lessons to children from low-income families, in foster care or with special needs.

Those wishing to adopt an animal must spend a day at Hooves & Paws watching, pitching in and learning what it takes to care for that type of animal.

Education is a big component of the rescue's mission.

"In the rural areas, we saw a huge need for animal rescue and also education," Genea said. "People get these big dogs and horses and don't realize how much it costs to maintain them. Big dogs are also real cute when they're little, but without socialization they can have problems with aggression."

Most days, Bill and Genea get home from work, change their clothes and spend the evening caring for the animals.

"It's a whole lot of work," Genea said. "But the rewards are, I'm serious, you can't believe. When you see a horse

### Lend a hand

To donate to Hooves & Paws Rescue, adopt an animal or just learn more, visit [www.hoovespaws.org](http://www.hoovespaws.org) or call 712-527-3721

that is starved and you think this guy is not going to be able to walk, he's going to die in my hands, and then you see him running and playing, it doesn't get any better.

"It just doesn't."

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#### **A few updates:**

- The good fortune just keeps coming to John Mangan and his band at the Omaha Nation School.

Since my Jan. 3 column on the young musicians at the school on the Macy, Neb., reservation, even more donations have arrived.

An Omaha woman last week brought two sets of orchestra bells and a snare drum, band teacher Mangan said.

Two weeks ago, a check came in the mail for \$200. So did a clarinet.

A Methodist Women's group from Bellevue has adopted the band as its January mission outreach and plans to send a cash donation.

In all, 23 people have donated an instrument or cash or have made plans to donate.

Said Mangan: "Things are happening."

To contact him, call the school at 402-837-5622 or e-mail him at [jmangan@esu1.org](mailto:jmangan@esu1.org).

- After a Community Connection story on the Center for Healthy Aging, Ministries, Programs and Services ran last Saturday, phones at the center lit up.

CHAMPS works to support healthy aging in five categories: spiritual, emotional, social, physical and financial. The program, which began in January 2006, is housed at St. Paul Lutheran Church, 13271 Millard Ave.

An official at the center said folks have been surprised at the number of calls from people interested in the program. A handful already have signed up for classes.

Said Chris Rohlk: "It's been really good."

Call the center at 895-2224.

- Readers have responded to the story of Alex Hermstad, a 15-year-old Storm Lake, Iowa, girl who hasn't said a word in 18 months.

Her problems started in March 2005 when Alex lost movement in her left arm. By February 2006, she was paralyzed, and, by July 2007, she had stopped talking.

The cause is a mystery.

At least 20 readers have contacted the family in the last week, wanting to help.

Said her mom, Lori Hermstad: "We are inspired by the idea that people outside of our area are trying to be an outreach to seek help for us. Thank you."

To get in touch with Lori Hermstad, e-mail [alexarmy@hotmail.com](mailto:alexarmy@hotmail.com).

Contact the Omaha World-Herald [newsroom](#)

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