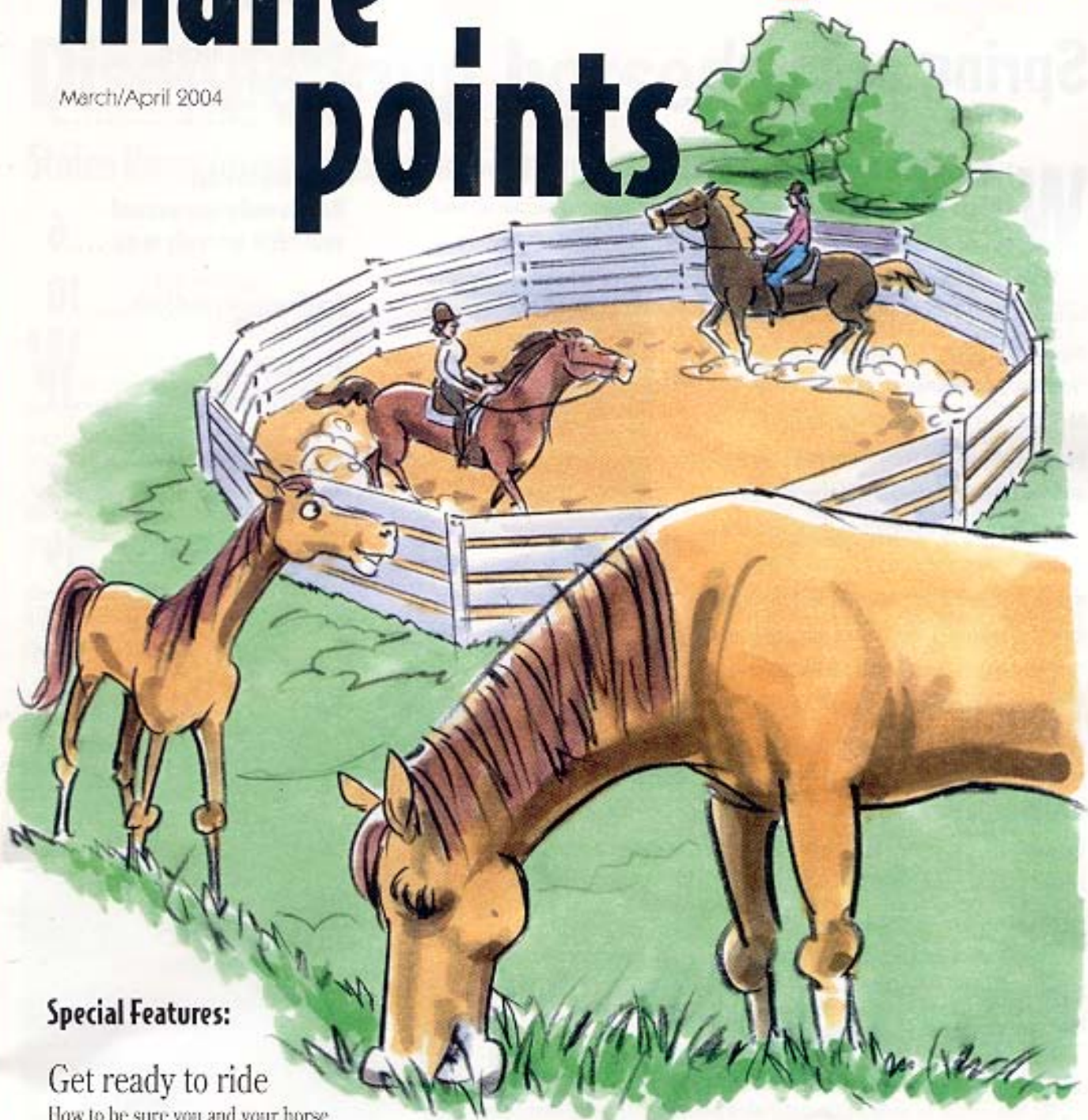


mane points

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 SOUTHERN STATES



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Disappearing horses

Stolen Horse International, Inc. – promoting theft education my way

By Debi Metcalfe

What started as a search for Idaho turned into a mission that continues today through Stolen Horse International, Inc. Victims of crime react differently. They work through the anger, fear and loss in various ways. Promoting theft education, I have decided, is my way.

I never thought about someone stealing my horse. It happens to the other person, right? People associate horse theft with the “Old West,”

which is a mistaken belief. My racking horse, Idaho, was stolen in 1997. There is nothing like learning a lesson the hard way.

When Idaho was stolen, my husband and I felt like we were suffocating, consumed by an uncontrollable illness with no foreseeable end. We felt immobilized by the feelings, which caused us to lose focus on daily routines. We were physically, emotionally and mentally hurt.

The end of normal began for us one September morning more than six years ago. We lost so much — our horse, our trust in people and our innocence.

Theft does not discriminate. It touches all breeds, disciplines, and horses of any value.

Pay attention! With approximately 40,000 to 55,000 horses stolen each year in the United States, theft only *seems* like a silent crime among us.

Before there was SHI

When Idaho was stolen, we faxed fliers to many people and businesses associated with horses. We searched through hundreds of horses by traveling to sales and following tips. The bills were high and the search was slow.

I was surprised to find no resources for help on horse theft on the Internet. Unknowingly, my work started building a network of people willing to assist in the search for stolen horses. That network is now called Stolen Horse International, Inc. (SHI).

We recovered Idaho on Sept. 17, 1998, after her flier was seen on a convenience store's door. She had endured starvation, sickness, miles of travel, abuse, and was sold at least five times before finding a home with a sweet 10-year-old girl in Tennessee.

It was a bittersweet day my husband, Harold, and I will never forget. Neither will the family who had grown to love Idaho over six months of nursing her back to health and show competitions. They, too, were victims of the same crime, but in a different way.

What are Idaho Alerts and NetPosse?

Years later, many victims are now helped by the quick action of NetPosse volunteers and Idaho Alerts for horses.

The Idaho Alert, SHI's alert system for missing and stolen horses, is named in honor of Idaho and all the people involved in locating and loving Idaho.

The NetPosse theory is simple. The more people who get involved cause more people to learn about theft, and the recovery rate gets much higher.

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Debi Metcalfe and Idaho, the namesake of SHI's Idaho Alert System for finding stolen horses

Disappearing horses

Continued from page 3

When the news of theft reaches SHI, time is of the essence. SHI and the NetPosse volunteers spring into action. I immediately send the Idaho Alert to thousands of people who pass it on to thousands more.

When you receive an Idaho Alert, you can view the flier created by SHI, see pictures of the horse, read a description, and get information that might help in the horse's recovery.

NetPosse volunteers post fliers, distribute them, attend horse events and auctions, and send encouraging messages to the victims. As the information travels, other people become aware of thefts and horses are often found. Frequently, people who receive Idaho Alerts aren't official NetPosse members, but soon join. Others simply pass the information along out of kindness.

Information travels quickly and many horses have been recovered thanks to this system. One horse was located in just 30 hours after emails with pertinent information were circulated through the Internet, proving NetPosse and the Idaho Alert system work!

*Stolen Horse International, Inc. is a non-profit corporation in the state of North Carolina, currently seeking 501(c)3 status from the federal government. SHI is funded by sales from the book *Horse Theft, Been There—Done That*, proceeds from the Southern States S.H.O.W. Program, and donations.*

Visit SHI at www.netposse.com View the fliers of currently missing horses and read the stories of those who have been recovered. You could be the key to helping another horse get home.

One owner's experience

"The police couldn't tell me what to do, but I started calling feed stores, horse people, vets, farriers, and anyone else I could think of," Diana Reid says of the theft of her horse in April 2002.

"I made fliers and sent them to anyone who might look at them and put them up. Unfortunately, it was about two weeks later that I got Debi Metcalfe's number and finally got some real information about what to do."

Diana's horse, Micki, is still missing. The repercussions are still apparent in her life. She knows that she will never quit looking in pastures when she is driving. She wonders if she will ever pass a horse trailer and not wonder what kind of horse is inside.

Diana reminds us all, "You don't just get your horse stolen — you get your life stolen."

Life can change direction in a heartbeat, and send us down paths we never chose, and launch us on journeys we never intended to take. No one is immune to fate.

Law enforcement

Law enforcement officers are often overloaded with cases, and officers are finding NetPosse a useful tool in their investigations.

Matt Lunsford of the Preble County, Ohio, Sheriff's office said, "This is a wonderful resource and Debi's ability and dedication make it an outstanding law enforcement tool. Contacting SHI is in my department's plan of action in case of horse theft."

Don't turn your back

Stolen horses can be anywhere. Searching for one is like trying to find a needle in a haystack, except in this case, the haystack keeps moving.

The next time you hear or read about a theft don't turn away thinking, "That horse is gone. It's a waste of time." Never underestimate the power of one. Victims need your help.

Can you honestly say it won't happen to you? 🐾

Debi Metcalfe is a rider, writer, speaker and founder of Stolen Horse International, Inc. She lives in Shelby, N.C.

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What can you do?

Offer your help. How long does it take to hang a flier at the feed store when you buy feed? Would you forward an email theft notice to your friends? Could you post a flier at the next horse event you attend? Make a difference. Join one of the NetPosse groups today at www.netposse.com.

Turn your empty feed bags into cash for SHI with Southern States' S.H.O.W. (Special Horse Organization Winners) program. Just by doing what you're already doing — giving your horses Southern States feed, SHI can earn 10¢ for each proof of purchase from Reliance feed bags and 25¢ for each Legends® or Triple Crown® feed bag.

Ann Schulmerich is SHI's S.H.O.W. Program coordinator. Please send her your proof of purchase coupons. Email her at bajrfam@kyol.net, or get her mailing address and more information at www.netposse.com/S.H.O.W.Program.htm.

SHI will have a booth and Debi Metcalfe will present programs at the 2004 Virginia Equine Extravaganza in Richmond, April 29-May 2.