

THE COURIER

OF MONTGOMERY  COUNTY

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Montgomery County Commissioners match \$15,000 DA contribution to help HSPCA with 200 seized horses

By: Jay R. Jordan

Montgomery County is helping ease the cost burden for the Houston SPCA from the more than 200 horses recently seized off of League Line Road. Commissioners approved matching \$15,000 paid by the District Attorney's Office, totaling \$30,000 worth of funds to the association. HSPCA estimates it spends \$8,000 per day caring for the horses.

"We've been incurring debt on a daily basis," Brian Latham, HSPCA director of communications, said. "The last time I checked, which was more than a week ago, we were up to (roughly) \$200,000 and had only raised \$100,000, so we're deeply in debt. It costs more to care for these animals than what we're getting in through donations, so \$30,000 does help us quite a bit." The horses have been in HSPCA care since late June, with some cared for onsite and most transported to three Houston-area locations.

County Attorney JD Lambright said his office and the County Auditor's Office are working closely to determine how the funds will get into HSPCA's hands. Legal hurdles dictate that the DA's Office cannot directly "cut a check" to HSPCA, but it must instead pay the vendors from which HSPCA bought supplies. Because of similar constraints, Lambright said they will know how the commissioners will pay their \$15,000 by the end of the week.

Cases Against the Hoffmans

Herman and Kathleen Hoffman appealed a decision by Precinct 1 Justice of the Peace Wayne Mack remanding all of the then-207 horses into HSPCA care. According to Lambright, there's a 10-day period when the trial can be set, which started Thursday after Herman Hoffman filed the appeal. The Hoffmans are entitled to a jury trial during the appellate phase, which Herman Hoffman requested during the first civil hearing in Mack's court. The appellate trial will take place in County Court-at-Law 2, with Judge Claudia Laird presiding.

Criminally, the Hoffmans each face three misdemeanor charges for the alleged animal cruelty, but those charges could be elevated as the investigation continues. Cruelty to livestock animals is a Class A misdemeanor if a person fails to provide necessary food, water or care for a livestock animal or abandons a livestock animal, among other reasons. The offense becomes a state jail felony if a person tortures an animal, among other reasons. The Hoffmans will appear before County Court-at-Law 1 Judge Dennis Watson at 1:30 p.m. Wednesday in their first appearance on the criminal matter.

Horse Care

Latham said HSPCA euthanized four horses after they had trouble taking to the treatment and were getting worse, leaving the League Line herd down to 203. "It was to end suffering," Latham said.

“These horses were not recovering from their medical problems that they had. It was a humane euthanization to end struggling and pain.”

As for the rest of the horses, Latham said they are seeing progress but still have trouble assimilating them. The horses had not been touched by any human until the HSPCA arrived, Latham said, and they have been working on their health alongside their socialization. They are being cared for in Houston and at an HPSCA facility in Waller County.

HSPCA estimates it will spend \$508,281 since the beginning of July to July 25 on top of the \$122,254 spent during the five days from the time they took the horses into their care until June 30. That cost includes veterinary care, human resources and other external resources and supplies, such as feed. A majority of the horses received rabies and West Nile vaccines as well as deworming medicine and a Coggins test. Since the horses still need care and socialization, Latham said they are far from being available for adoption, but those who want to adopt other horses under HSPCA care can visit HoustonSPCA.org and click the ‘Adopt’ tab.