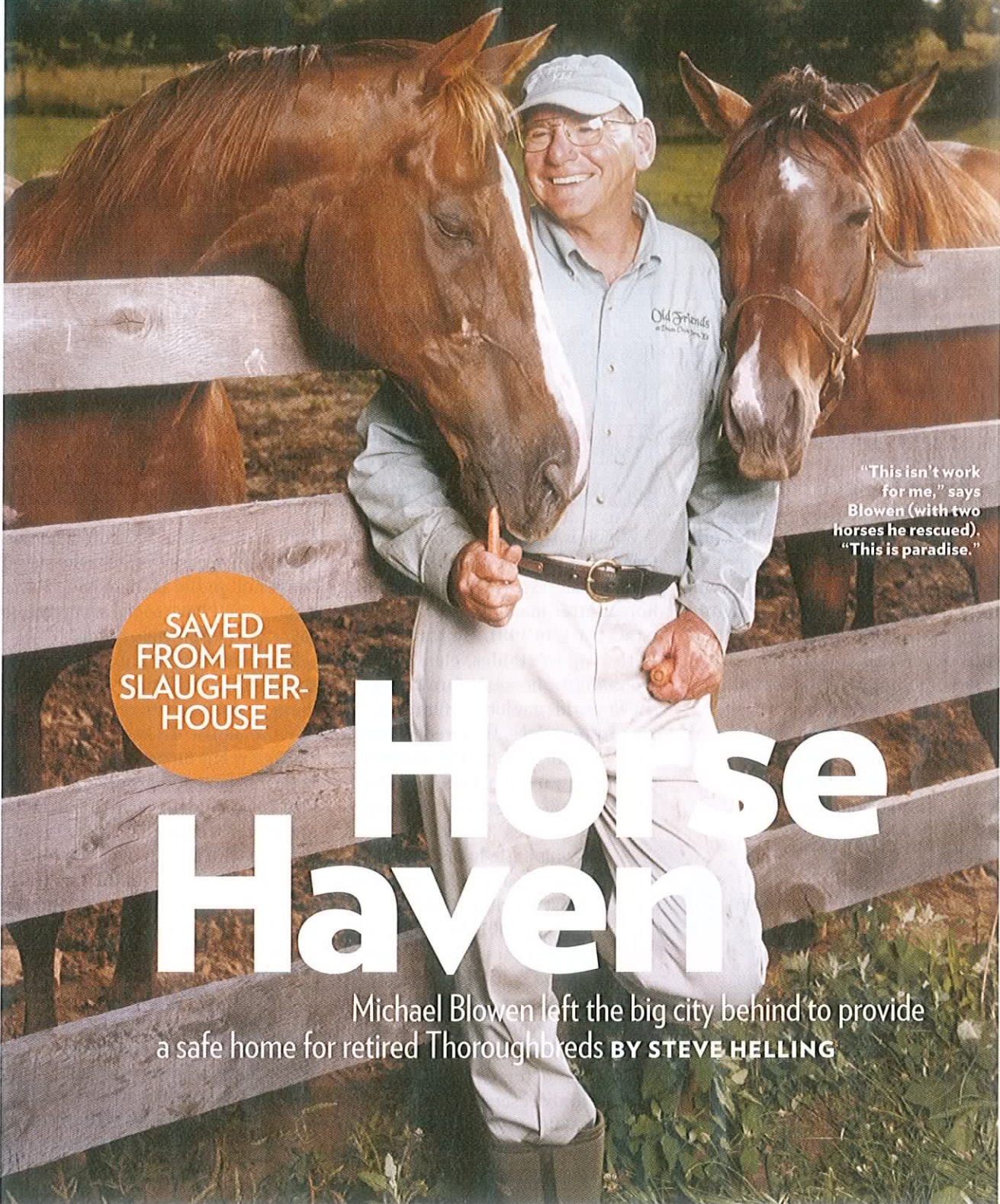


People
HEROES
AMONG US



SAVED
FROM THE
SLAUGHTER-
HOUSE

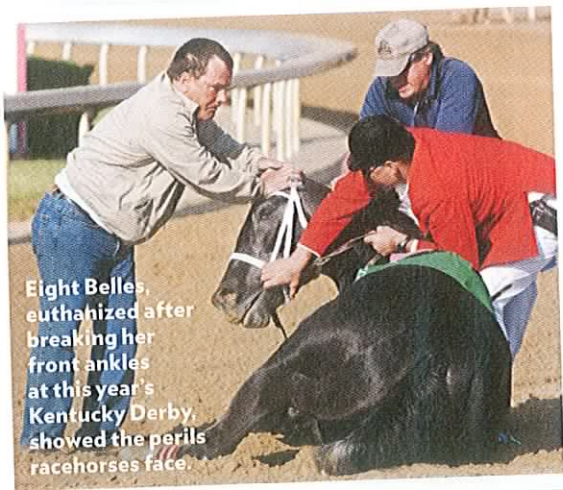
Horse Haven

Michael Blowen left the big city behind to provide a safe home for retired Thoroughbreds **BY STEVE HELLING**

"This isn't work for me," says Blowen (with two horses he rescued). "This is paradise."

The news would have stunned Michael Blowen if it weren't so common: Williamstown, a retired racehorse that had earned hundreds of thousands of dollars, was going to be euthanized in two days. "How much money would it take to keep him alive?" Blowen, 61, asked the friend who alerted him. Only \$800, he was told. Blowen sent a check overnight, and soon the Thoroughbred arrived at Blowen's rescue farm, Old Friends Equine, in Georgetown, Ky., safe from the fate that awaits so many racehorses. "There are 36,000 horses bred every year, but only one can win the Kentucky Derby," Blowen says. "What happens to the rest of them? These horses face a death sentence."

Hundreds of racehorses meet violent ends every year. At least 5,000 have died since 2003, according to a survey of U.S. racetracks by the Associated Press. Many—like Barbaro, the 2006 Kentucky Derby winner that was euthanized because of complications following surgery—died after being injured on the track. But others, even former champions, end up in slaughterhouses or slowly starving to death after being abandoned by owners who don't want to shell out \$10,000 for their annual upkeep. "The way some horses are treated after their careers are over is a tragedy," says Doug Byars, a veterinarian with the Kentucky Equine Education Project, an advocacy program. "If people knew, they'd be outraged."



Eight Belles, euthanized after breaking her front ankles at this year's Kentucky Derby, showed the perils racehorses face.

Leaving Boston "was a no-brainer," says Diane White (with Blowen and Silver Charm). "I was happy to move down here and be with these horses."

"Racehorses don't have social security. We need to help them"

—MICHAEL BLOWEN

Which is why Blowen opened Old Friends, a 92-acre expanse of Kentucky bluegrass. He fell in love with horses after making his first visit to a racetrack in 1981. He started volunteering in stables, cleaning and grooming the horses before taking the subway to his day job as a film critic for *The Boston Globe*. He loved the work but was haunted by the desperate cries of unwanted horses being loaded onto trailers destined for slaughterhouses. "They knew what was going to happen to them," Blowen says. "They made the most horrible sounds."

So in 2001, he and his wife of 26 years, Diane White, a *Globe* columnist, quit their jobs and moved to Kentucky. They borrowed \$1 million from a bank to purchase the land for Old Friends, the only rescue farm that takes stallions, who require larger paddocks, higher fences and more expensive veterinarian care than other horses.

Blowen now houses 30 Thoroughbreds, including Popcorn Deelites, who played Seabiscuit in the 2003 movie. "Racehorses don't have social security," he says. "We need to help them."

The couple have poured their life savings into the farm and have spent as much as \$18,000 to rescue five horses from Japan. To keep costs down, Blowen relies on donated services of veterinarians and groomers. He has also opened up the farm to the public and receives more than 20,000 yearly visitors who swoon over the horses they once watched on the racetrack. "Those horses are the stars," Blowen says. "They deserve better than to be thrown away."

Know a hero?

Send suggestions to **HEROESAMONGUS@PEOPLEMAG.COM**

Please include your name, phone number and return e-mail address. For more information about this story, go to www.oldfriendsequine.org.