**Critter Corner: “Blackie”**

**By: Rachael Komulainen, Hart Park Animal Keeper**

* **Blackie: January 15, 1978 – September 24, 2018**
* **Breed: Standardbred**
* **Sex: Gelding**

**On September 24th, we lost an old friend: “Blackie”, our most senior horse. Blackie was 40 years old!! Literally, he lived long enough for two horse lifetimes!**

**Our vet, Dr. Roueche, said that Blackie was the equivalent of a 110-year old man. Well, he certainly seemed to have more lives than a cat. No matter which health obstacle that life threw at him, he would overcome it. Over the last few years, he had many debilitating health issues – as one would expect with someone his age – yet he kept going, like the Energizer Bunny! He had lost his sight, hearing and teeth. In addition, he would lose feeling in his back right hip, at times, which caused him to struggle getting up, after sitting or laying on the ground. As with any disabled individual, we made accommodations for him. We took out an entire wall of his outside stall area, to increase the space for him to get back up. In addition, some of our fencing was replaced with boards to buffer him, in case he was struggling on the ground. And, he was certainly a living testimony to the value of feeding Equine Senior to older horses. His Senior feed, along with supplements and vitamins, allowed him to be healthy and handsome up until the end.**

**Blackie was 40 years old and, yet, he never got a swayed back, which is so common in old horses – his back just never dropped. And, despite his physical issues, he LOVED his life! How do I know this? Because he showed me with his behavior. Blackie’s favorite part of life was getting groomed. The second anyone started to groom him, he would rest his head on the tool shed, close his eyes, and let out a contented sigh. Then, he would stand like a statue, for as long the groomer was willing to groom him.**

**A little history: Blackie was the ranger’s horse up at Vasquez Rocks for many years. Also, he was the point horse on many of the Antonovich Rides. He patrolled the trails at both Vasquez Rocks and Hart Park. Ultimately, Blackie was donated to the park by a former Hart Park Animal Keeper on October 28, 2003.**

**The last 15 years of Blackie’s life have been good ones. He has been a fixture of the Hart Park Barnyard, with his handsome looks and sweet demeanor. All of the past and present staff that have been fortunate enough to work around Blackie, have deemed it an honor. Over the years, he has been a stellar ambassador for Hart Park, with the thousands of patrons that have visited.**

**As befitting a legend, such as Blackie, we are in the process of making a memorial to him. Blackie was cremated, which the FOHP (Friends Of Hart Park) generously paid for – THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH!! Afterward, we buried his ashes on the property. We are working with a donor on creating a memorial plaque at the horse corral fence, and we will be doing something special at the gravesite – stay tuned for a future update!**

**THANK YOU to everyone that visited Blackie, took care of Blackie, and donated/donates toward the upkeep of our Barnyard animals!! It is always sad to lose such a friend, as Blackie, yet we were truly blessed to have had him in our lives for so long!**