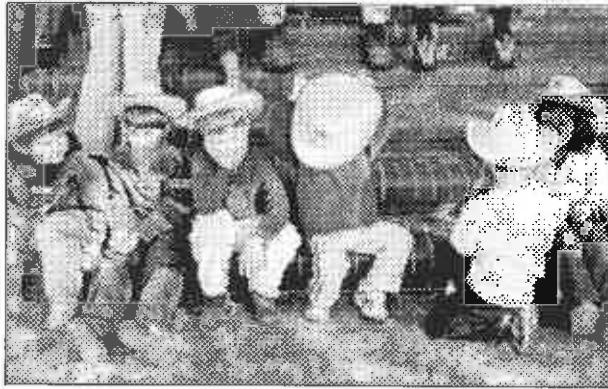


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Horses head for new pastures

Development displaces stables



Cole Spector, Leo deSouza, Taylor Peckham, Brandon Walla, Kyle McDowell and Katie Hirasaki wait to ride horses during a birthday party at J&H Stables.

Staff Photos by Lisa Lauck

BONNIE ROCHMAN, Staff Writer

When J&H Stables trotted out its first horses in 1966, its rolling hills and green, green grass were in the middle of nowhere, accessible only by dirt road.

Now it's Raleigh real estate coveted by developers, which is why Sunday, J&H will offer its final trail rides into the solitude of adjacent William B. Umstead State Park.

Come Monday, it's happy trails for a business that introduced many local residents to the pleasure of swapping a \$20 bill for an hour on horseback.

Horses are making way for houses: The farm's 167 acres are being turned into an upscale neighborhood, stable manager Simone Brannan said. "The property ... became too valuable for animals to stand on," Brannan said.

For Brannan, the family-owned stables were more than a business. Her parents, Jean and Hilton Lamm — the "J&H" — launched the enterprise. They moved into a home on the site. Brannan grew up there; her parents still live there.

Soon, everything will change.

Hilton and Jean Lamm are moving to Alton, Va., about an hour from Raleigh, where they will run a small ranch offering riding, fishing, hiking and biking.

Brannan is relocating north to Creedmoor Road beyond Interstate 540. At her new, smaller site, she'll continue to board horses and give lessons. There's not enough room for rental riding, but Brannan is starting some new offerings, including lessons that incorporate a smorgasbord of riding styles and Ridercise, geared toward equestrian-minded, stay-at-home moms who want to get on a horse when their kids are in school.

She plans to open the new J&H next month. Until then, Brannan is savoring the present, strolling the old J&H grounds, tacking up horses for riders one last time, committing 39 years of memories to heart.

Like the time a young man rented a steed on which to propose to his girlfriend. Brannan watched from the sidelines as Mr. Cotton, a white quarterhorse, pranced up to the girlfriend's window. (The woman said yes.)

"It was breathtaking," Brannan said.

J&H is the kind of hushed place where you can hear the breeze whisper through the leaves. There are rustic wooden fences, three cats, a dog, even two potbellied Vietnamese pigs.

It doesn't hurt that J&H sits just across a two-lane road from Umstead, with access to the park's bridle trails.

But that road, Ebenezer Church, has changed a lot in four decades. Hundreds of cars now zoom by each hour, and it's a sought-after address for big houses with big yards and bigger price tags.

It's almost surprising that J&H has been able to hold on this long.

"We have always owned that land, and we had always told them at some point in time we would sell that land," said Barbara Baker Kennedy, whose family owns the property and has signed a contract to put "high-dollar" homes there. Development probably will begin in the spring, Baker Kennedy said.

J&H has been far more than a bucolic oasis for horse lovers. Its horses — with names such as Pudd'n, Cobalt and Foxy Lady — were for hire, and they showed up at some pretty interesting places. One stood in for an elephant, transporting a Hindu groom across the parking lot of the North Raleigh Hilton.

Several J&H horses also appeared in the barn scenes in the movie "Firestarter," which was filmed in Wilmington and featured Drew Barrymore.

Autistic and blind children go to J&H to ride. Little kids celebrate their birthdays there. There are summer camps and corporate team-building exercises.

And in May, Barbara Crissman got married there. A rock band jammed, kids enjoyed pony rides, and Caribou, the palomino quarterhorse Crissman bought from J&H, looked on from a nearby corral.

"We told all our friends to wear their best pair of jeans," Crissman said. "It was a perfect day."

Other horse farms in the area, most much farther from the center of Raleigh, are jockeying for J&H customers.

Dead Broke Farm, on 60 hilly acres off Leesville Road, has been renting to the public for more than a year. It gives two-hour guided rides but doesn't offer boarding.

Rebecca Rainey, owner of the Raleigh Equestrian Center at Creedmoor and Old Creedmoor Roads, said she could accommodate up to 10 riders, possibly by summertime. J&H, though, had 50 horses for rent.

"I don't know where everyone is going to go," Rainey said.

On this final weekend, Crissman, for one, is sticking with J&H.

"Everyone in the community is just devastated they're closing," she said. "It's such a beautiful piece of property. To take down that property to put up a subdivision that only benefits a few people is a huge loss. I wish there was a better way."

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