

THE FRONT PAGE

News & Views You Can Use

PGEC 'Bans' *The Equiery*

Claims Article 'Unsupportive'

If you cannot find *The Equiery* around the concourse at the Prince George's Equestrian Center, there is a reason.

On Oct. 10, PGEC officials informed *Equiery* staff members that they would no longer distribute *The Equiery*, citing what they referred to as a comment that was "not very supportive" in the magazine's October 2006 issue.

The article in question, which can be found on page 8 of that issue or downloaded from the archives at www.equiery.com, applauds the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning (which owns PGEC) for funding a new covered arena at the equestrian center.

We then asked one of the state's largest equestrian organizations, the 1165-member Potomac Valley Dressage Association, if this could possibly bring them back to Maryland. Although the PVDA is a Maryland organization, it no longer holds its shows in Maryland because its members don't feel any of the state's locations can offer them the amenities they currently receive out of state. The article quoted PVDA President Betty Thorpe as saying that, whereas they think the covered arena is wonderful, the primary concern of [the PVDA's] members is the quality of the footing at PGEC.

Apparently, PGEC officials took exception to PVDA's

opinion and took us to task for not interviewing other organizations, subsequently informing us of their "punishment."

PGEC is a state owned and taxpayer-funded facility – owned and funded by you, our dear readers – and if the free press does not help the taxpayers watch over their own tax dollars and how they are spent, who will? We have always endeavored to be fair, to give congratulations and kudos when and where they are deserved (indeed, this particular article was laudatory), and to give constructive criticism when and where deserved. We are not the public relations arm of any government agency.

How about it, readers: Were we out of line?

In fairness to PGEC officials, who complained that we only interviewed the "one organization that has a problem with the equestrian center," we would like to give this opportunity to all Maryland equestrians and the leaders in Maryland horse organizations to share with us and our readers their opinions of the Prince George's Equestrian Center. Please send comments to editor@equiery.com.

If you would prefer to contact officials at the Prince George's Equestrian Center directly, you may do so by calling Bill Chambers at 301-952-7900 or william.chambers@pgparks.com.

In the meantime, vendors and show organizers can still distribute *The Equiery* from their shops

or the secretary's or show offices, but we will need to ship *The Equiery* directly to you, so please contact our offices to arrange for direct shipment: 800-244-9580 x11 or info@equiery.com.

-Crystal Brumme Kimball
Publisher

Necropsy Price Hikes: Debate Continues

by Laurel Scott

Because of local restrictions on the burial of dead horses, the options for many Maryland owners, until recently, have been to send their horses' bodies to a rendering plant, arrange for private cremations or send them to a laboratory that will necropsy them and then arrange for their disposal.

For smaller barns in particular, the latter option was once an affordable alternative to the so-called "knackers." It also had the added benefit of determining whether the horse's demise was preventable – and whether it suffered from a contagious disease that might have spread elsewhere.

However, last February, in a move considered long overdue

by the Maryland Department of Agriculture, the state's animal health labs increased their equine necropsy and disposal fees to more accurately reflect actual costs, including rising fuel prices, as well as the lack of government subsidization for non-food animal services (see *The Equiery's* March issue, archived at www.equiery.com). In addition, the fees for disposal services were separated from that of the necropsy.

The reaction among Maryland horsemen has been mixed. Some, like Worton event rider/trainer Kim Meier (who lost horses in last year's equine herpes outbreak), seemed resigned to the increase. "Prices go up on everything, and somehow in the horse industry they do not increase to reflect the actual costs in many areas," she said. "For instance, my feed prices elevate, yet I am reluctant to raise my board. Gas is triple what it was 10 yrs ago, but my vaning fees are not even double. So it is not unwarranted that state fees increase."

Others, like Maryland Horse Breeders Association president James Steele Jr. (who's also chairman of the Maryland Horse Industry Board), feel it's

We Want to Be Fair to PGEC!

Please share with *The Equiery* your opinions of the facilities at the Prince George's Equestrian Center
editor@equiery.com
FAX: 410-489-7828
Mail: P.O. Box 610
Lisbon, MD 21765

Past to Present: MD Necropsy & Disposal Fees

Fees prior to 1991:

All services were free

Fees 1991 – spring, 2006, for ADULT EQUINE necropsy and disposal:

IN STATE	OUT OF STATE
\$75	\$125

Current fees for ADULT EQUINE necropsy and disposal:

IN STATE	OUT OF STATE
\$275 + 50¢/pound for cremation or \$625 for necropsy with rendering	\$375 + 75¢/pound cremation or \$825 for necropsy with rendering

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IF YOU HAVE NEWS, VIEWS OR UPDATES TO CONTRIBUTE, PLEASE SEND THEM TO Editor at
The Equiery, P.O. Box 610, Lisbon, MD 21765 • FAX: 410-489-7828 • email editor@equiery.com.
Be sure to include your full name, phone number and address. All submissions become the property of *The Equiery*.

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a “travesty” that horses can be necropsied in other states (such as Pennsylvania, see below) for less than they can in Maryland. There is also some concern that the increased cost might discourage people whose horses should be necropsied from getting the procedure done, impacting attempts to keep tabs on potential outbreaks. “The increase in the necropsy fee for horses greater than 300 pounds is [a substantial amount] over the previous rate – plus disposal,” noted Maryland Horse Council Vice President Jane Seigler, co-owner of Silver Spring’s Reddemeade Equestrian Center. “This might be a factor for some owners.”

Steele agreed. “I can understand that [the state] didn’t want horses being dumped because it was cheaper to go there than to Valley Protein,” he said. “But

with what their rates are now, they’re not going to get horses to come in – so we’re not going to know, a lot of times, when things are bad ... that was a way for the state to keep a finger on the pulse of what’s going on. It’s just not right.”

*‘I think it’s just the realities of a limited resource.’
– Michael Erskine, DVM*

The responsibility for doing the “right thing” will ultimately come down to the owner, said MHC President Michael Erskine, a veterinarian. “I do have concerns about [the increased cost] being a deterrent, in that we don’t find out about things as soon as we should or could,” he said. “But I think it’s just the realities of a limited resource.”

As the Riding & Boarding Stable representative on the Maryland Horse Industry Board, Carol Wicker is also concerned – but for different reasons associated with smaller stables like her Fence Post Farms in Pasadena. “I’m really very unhappy with

the large increase, especially for incineration of older horses that die,” she said. “I don’t consider them pets, but they’ve been loyal servants, and we’ve been having ours cremated. And at this large increase, we probably won’t be able to afford that in the future. I just think it was too large an increase across the board at one time.”

Maryland vs. Pennsylvania

Currently, New Bolton Center near Kennett Square, Pennsylvania is one of the low cost leaders in the region for necropsies and disposals. Unlike in Maryland, where the rates are different for in-state and out-of-state clients, New Bolton has one across-the-board fee schedule for most services.

According to Dr. Perry Habecker, chief of New Bolton’s Large Animal Necropsy Service, these services are to some extent self-subsidized, with the costs underwritten in part by the Pennsylvania taxpayer. “It

depends on ... how much every state wants to underwrite animal diagnostics,” he explained. “States like Pennsylvania realize the massive input to our economy from our Ag sector, and feel obligated to provide them with economical diagnostic services. If we don’t see any of this stuff, 1) you lose the people who are capable of diagnosing it; 2) you don’t know what kind of disease incidence is circulating in the background; and 3) you never know when a bioterrorist slips one by you.”

As for the cost of these services in Maryland, “I think that the big issue is body disposal,” Habecker noted. “They have to address it with a big fee, and we’re sort of eating the cost, and we have an outlet for rendering disposal. I’m convinced that’s the big difference.”

Many Maryland vets are aware of these price differences; but that doesn’t mean clients will be stampeding north for equine necropsies – nor would New

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MD vs. PA Necropsy & Disposal Fees

Maryland Labs	New Bolton
<u>ADULT EQUINE NECROPSIES</u>	
\$275	*\$88
<u>FOAL NECROPSIES</u>	
\$125	*\$44
<u>CREMATIONS</u>	
50¢/pound (w/some exceptions)	approx. \$200-\$1000 plus
<u>RENDERING/DISPOSAL</u>	
\$350 for rendering through Valley Protein	\$35 for carcass disposal
NOTE: In Maryland, disposal only includes incineration of the carcass only, with no necropsy performed. Horse owners may elect rendering instead of cremation, but only after necropsy. Cremation with ash return is available at all Maryland labs except Oakland.	
* New Bolton also charges a \$10 accession fee to help recover costs when multiple samples are done for one type of test.	

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Bolton be equipped to handle that. As Habecker pointed out, every lab has its own advantages and its own areas of expertise, and necropsy is only part of the cost. Indeed, the price of transportation and disposal might make the trip north too expensive in many cases. Then there's the time factor. "It's often a whole day event for someone to bring us an animal, and it comes down to what the client considers convenient," he said.

Public Health Concerns

To Steele, the rate hike seems an unfair burden. "They said they were going to raise everybody, but they didn't," he said. "They say the other forms of livestock [food animals] are subsidized because of mad cow disease, avian influenza, and stuff like that. So they get their necropsies at what were once our normal prices. But you don't do a tenfold increase overnight!"

The increased disposal prices don't help, either. "Granted, I know fuel prices went up," Steele said. "It's one thing if a person says 'My old horse who's 30 years old died, and I want

you to cremate him.' But people in production agriculture who are raising horses for sale cannot afford to do that, and won't do that."

Steele thinks that the necropsy rate hike has public health ramifications, too, citing a case of equine rabies that was believed to be a toothache until a post-mortem proved otherwise. "People were all in its mouth, and this, that and the other," he explained. "And if that horse hadn't been 'posted' [necropsied], no one who had been around that animal would have known it was carrying rabies."

He likened the situation to the need for policemen; since they are so vital to the public safety, he asserted, the bottom line shouldn't be a factor. "I don't cry so much that they're doing it at a loss; they're providing a service in order to get something, information on what's going on," he commented. "I know the Ag Department said they were trying to bring [prices] back in line with [the cost of] services ... but it's the same way with firemen; this is a public health issue.

"If horses are truly one of the top three in agriculture, and ag-

riculture is the biggest industry in the state, you would think you'd want to do stuff to help the industry," he continued. "So you'd think there'd be a way there could be a subsidy for the necropsies for legitimate producers trying to find out [about potentially infectious/contagious health problems]."

Outside Funding

As Erskine explained, "The subsidies available for [state veterinarian Guy Hohenhaus] are in investigations for infectious and contagious diseases. So when you're doing a necropsy to see if a horse had laminitis or Cushing's disease or a twisted colon, those are [lower state priorities] than avian influenza or Mad Cow disease. From the public health [standpoint], the biggest one from horses that would qualify is rabies."

In certain cases, the state of Maryland will pay for equine necropsies and disposals. As Hohenhaus explained, "[Veterinary] reports lead to investigation. Investigation may lead to regulatory action. Regulatory action may lead to the ordering of diagnostics (to confirm or refute suspected cause). In that case, we pay ... and when we order tests, we cover the disposal." But, he stressed, this does not mean free state necropsies for every reported case. For example, "During the racetrack-associated herpes outbreak of '06, we ceased ordering necropsies once the diagnosis was established," he said.

Cases that do not qualify for state-funded necropsies might well be addressed by the Maryland Horse Council's new Business & Stables: Economic Development committee and its new Equine Health and Welfare committee. "These committees will focus on issues of importance to Maryland business and stable owners, and on equine health issues," said Seigler. "[They] could consider ways to assist facility owners who suffer catastrophic

loss through disease outbreaks, which for some reason do not qualify for state-funded necropsies – for example, by establishing special funds, or by working with insurance companies to provide coverage. Anyone interested in joining the committees in this work should contact [me] at jane@reddemeade.com."

Erskine believes it's certainly possible to procure additional funding for services like necropsies. "I think there is a state interest in an agricultural industry like horses, and as diseases emerge and are potentially contagious, there may be some room for state involvement from the subsidized standpoint, because there's a public interest in protecting the horse industry," he said. "Maybe there are things, in the future, that can be done through grants or whatever for disease surveillance. I think there are places where money

can come from; they may be private resources or corporate resources that are looking to study something ... or research disease incidence."

As for the increased cost of disposals, "I don't think it's an ideal situation," Erskine admitted. "I'm not sure if that's something that will end up being a problem, and it kind of relates to the slaughter issue, because you do start to just pile up the costs associated with doing the right thing in the right way."

For more information on Maryland's new necropsy/disposal fee schedule and the state's list of "reportable" diseases, visit www.eququery.com.

Last Voting Hurdle

from the Anne Arundel County Horse Council

Stablemates, election day will determine if our dream of a Horse Park on 875 acres in Anne Arundel County will be realized, or if it is just another dashed hope. The choice is just that clear.

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Have opinions on the necropsy/disposal rate hike? Please fax your comments to 410-489-7828 or e-mail them to editor@eququery.com.

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As we learned painfully last winter, no plans for the Horse Park will go forward without the support of the Anne Arundel county executive. While there are many other factors involved, that is the only absolute. The county executive can (and did) derail the project. The pending change in administration gave us another chance this year, but the election of a county executive who opposes the Horse Park will end further discussion.

John Leopold is opposed to the Park. He has not demonstrated a willingness to discuss the matter with interested constituents, Horse Park advocates, or even state officials. He turned down our entreaties to speak with him and address whatever concerns he had.

George Johnson remains *open and interested* in the project. While not committing himself to any specific terms for building the facility, he was interested enough to spend an entire day visiting the Virginia Horse Center in Lexington, speaking with Pony Club organizers who were sponsoring activities, touring the facilities, and studying the economic impact it has on the region.

That is the kind of reasoned analysis you would want from a leader on any issue.

Sheriff Johnson needs our support at the polls Nov. 7. He also needs to know the equestrian community is active and visible in backing him. **Please vote** on Nov. 7!

This isn't the final jump, but it is the biggest so far. Let's clear it and make up for lost time.

Other election notes:

Mike Shay, candidate for Dist. 33B Delegate, continues to demonstrate his understanding of the significance of this park for the horse community, agriculture, the environment and the economy. He has also been instrumental in helping to enlighten other candidates. If you are in District 33B, please give Mike the support he has given the horse community.

And finally, if it were not for the vision of **Governor Bob Ehrlich**, this project would not have gotten off the ground. His administration initiated the project and has continued to show support.

Vote FOR Question 1

from Partners for Open Space

For the past several months, Partners for Open Space has been working with other groups to raise awareness and support for the Disposition of Park Lands – Constitutional Amendment, listed as Question 1 on the Nov. 7 state ballot.

Our efforts to promote the amendment have been daunting, because we have found that most voters throughout Maryland are not familiar with this proposed amendment. With no discernible opposition, the amendment has received very little attention from the press and we are concerned that this amendment will be overlooked on the ballot and will receive very few votes on Election Day.

WE NEED YOUR HELP! Sprawl is paving over Maryland, threatening our drinking water, and imposing on our quality of life. At the very least, we must stop this from happening to lands already protected from development.

Two years ago, the state was caught red-handed trying to sell protected land to a developer to build luxury homes. In 2004, the state tried to sell the so-called Salem Tract – an environmentally sensitive 836-acre tract of land in St. Mary's County – to a private developer for the same price the state purchased it in 2003. The developer, who stood to gain approximately \$7 million in tax breaks in exchange for donating about 200 acres to St. Mary's for schools and to preserve the remaining land, pulled out of the deal when the press exposed that he planned to build houses on portions of the "preserved"

property. On Nov. 7, we're going to have the chance to vote on a constitutional amendment that would prevent that sort of thing from happening.

The 2005 General Assembly passed a bill with bipartisan support which established the language for the constitutional amendment. This amendment, Question #1 on the November ballot, will prevent the state from selling any preserved state park, conservation, or recreational land without approval from the General Assembly and, if passed, would ultimately protect farms, parks, and open spaces for future generations. Both gubernatorial candidates support the amendment, which goes hand-in-hand with other legislation passed to protect open space.

Ballot Language:

Question 1 - Constitutional Amendment

Disposition of Park Lands

The Board of Public Works may not approve the sale, transfer, exchange, grant or other permanent disposition of any state-owned outdoor recreation, open space, conservation, preservation, forest, or parkland without the express approval of the General Assembly or of a committee that the General Assembly designates by statute, resolution or rule. ■
