

By Pam Graham
and
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Second Stride Founder Kim Smith with her adopted mare Florida Dawn

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Second Stride trainer Erin Buttigieg and her ex-racehorse Big

BEYOND THE FINAL FINISH LINE – A Second Stride Career

In the horse world, the words “elite” and “rescue” are rarely spoken in the same breath, but world-class thoroughbred adoption agency Second Stride is working hard to change that. Through what feels at times like an almost magical match-up of adopters, donors, volunteers and horses, Second Stride Founder and Executive Director Kim Smith has transformed a unique and ambitious vision into reality. What started as a one-woman, personally funded effort to salvage unemployed and out-of-luck horses is now an expertly run organization that not only saves lives, but excels at pinpointing the sport and lifestyle best suited for each Second Stride horse.

When a van pulls up to Second Stride’s idyllic 103 acres of

fertile Kentucky pastures, the horse inside might be a young thoroughbred that wasn’t fast enough to stay in racing or a graded stakes winner whose owners wish to honor with an extended life of purpose, productivity and dignity. Second Stride has placed the prodigy of a number of racing’s royalty, including A.P. Indy, Dynaformer, and Flower Alley. One Second Stride alumni, a son of Storm Cat whose dam was a Breeders’ Cup winning mare, showed ability at everything he tried, but quickly lost interest in anything repetitive. Second Stride found the perfect job for this blueblood. Capote Cat now does search and rescue in the mountains of North Carolina, where each day brings a new and interesting challenge and his owner reports that he fearlessly plunges into the roughest territory.



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Second Stride's open-minded, adventurous approach means they accept even the difficult cases, like fiery stallions and injured horses with the potential to regain soundness. Archer, for example, was a \$70,000 winner in danger of being put down after an accident that left him with a fractured sesamoid, torn suspensory and shattered splint bones. Archer's trainer brought him to Second Stride, where Vice-President Kathy Stim adopted him. Watching Stim work with Archer on a recent sunny afternoon, it was easy to see these two were meant to be together.

That phrase, "meant to be together," comes up often at Second Stride, where the high rate of successful horse/owner pairings can be attributed to a thoughtfully crafted transition plan, the commitment of dedicated volunteer board members and staff, and something less tangible - a chemistry between human and horse that just seems to arise and take shape.

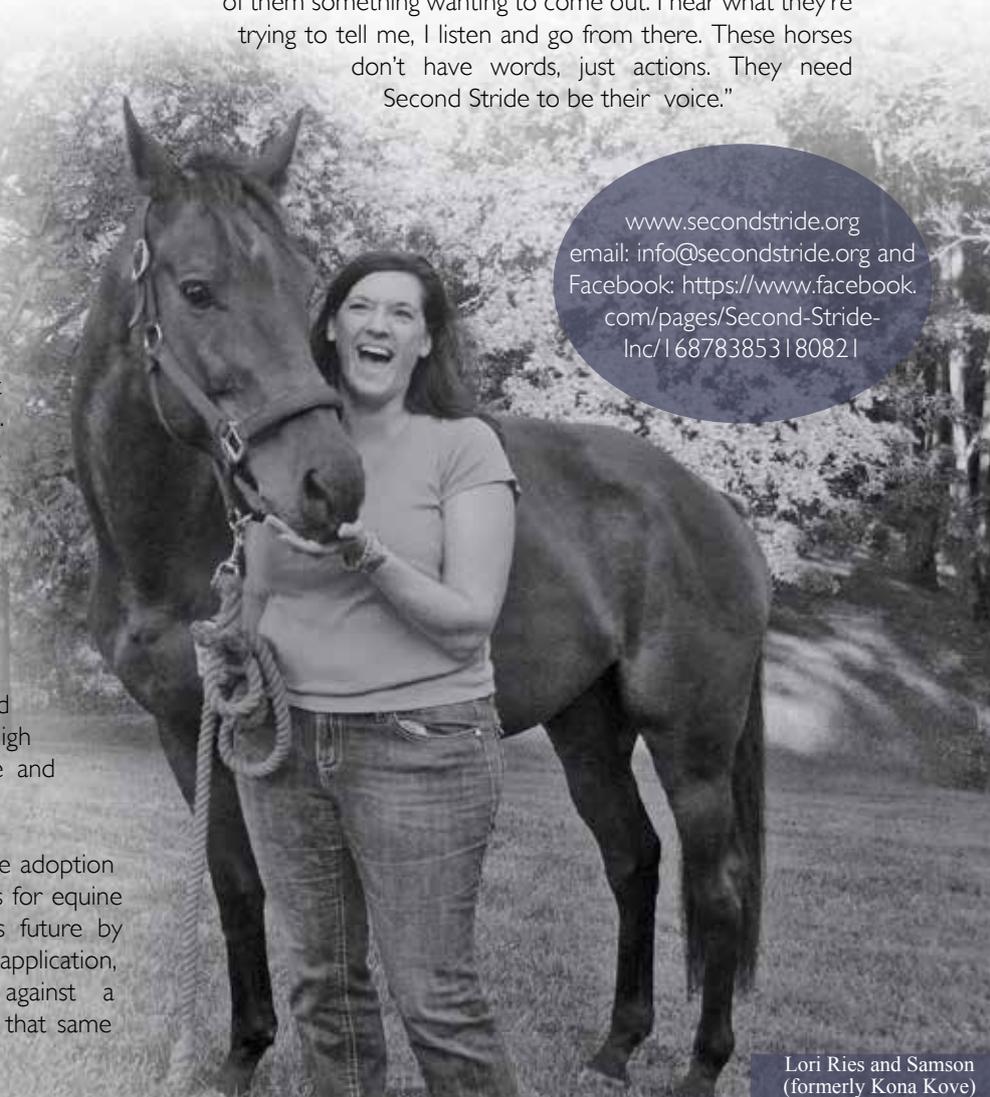
Horses fresh from the racetrack immediately embark on the Second Stride plan for continuing education designed to help them excel at their next career, whether in a competitive sport or trail riding. When asked to describe what goes through her mind as she makes the crucial decisions that so often create an ideal horse/owner match, Second Stride trainer Erin Buttigieg said, "It's very hard to describe it in words, it's more of a feel kind of thing. We had a few fillies come in a while back. All of them screamed 'I'm athletic and can conquer the world.' It wasn't their body type that said it, it was their presence. They just had an air about them that exuded confidence." She knew that for these girls, becoming a trail horse was not an option. "They had too much zeal for that type of career." So she targeted adopters with the desire and ability for a high performance horse that wants to strive and compete.

Second Stride's streamlined path to horse adoption reduces red tape and procedural barriers for equine donors, while safeguarding each horse's future by a rigorous vetting of every adoption application, which includes checking applicants against a database of known animal abusers. And that same

spirit of openness is what enables Second Stride to avoid restricting itself to only the most adoptable horses, a happy circumstance exemplified in the story of a horse that ran 25 races under the name Kona Kove.

Kona Kove dodged the slaughterhouse three times during a journey that took him from California to Arizona, then to South Carolina, and finally to Kentucky, into the safe and loving care at Second Stride. In Kona Kove's case, it was love at first sight between him and a volunteer, Lori Ries. This 9-year-old gelding, now named Samson, who came to Second Stride on his last string of luck, yet still unaccountably gracious and forgiving, now belongs to Ries and is living life to the fullest.

Trainer Erin Buttigieg captured the essence of Second Stride when she said, "These horses are my passion. I see in each of them something wanting to come out. I hear what they're trying to tell me, I listen and go from there. These horses don't have words, just actions. They need Second Stride to be their voice."



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