



Connecting new riders with horses is exceptionally gratifying. Learn from three experts how to add to your herd as your program grows.

GROWING YOUR HERD

Finding suitable horses can be tough in this market, but these experts offer eight tips for working your resources to get the right horses in your barn.

By Jennifer Paulson
Photos Courtesy of ASPCA

A hot horse market indicates great things for our industry, but it can make finding horses of all kinds a real challenge—especially horses that meet the criteria to be used in CHA lesson programs. It might take a little more effort on your part than it did once, but there are ways you can work your resources to get the right horses for your program. Here, three experts share their best tips.

First up in our experts is Carolyn Stimmel, a longtime CHA member. About 14 years ago, Stimmel found CHA as a way to certify instructors on her family's dude ranch, Red Rock Ranch in Kelly, Wyoming which is working on becoming CHA Site Accredited. On top of managing horses and wranglers for her dude ranch, she also trains polo ponies that she uses in the off season of her dude ranch, primarily in Texas during the winter months when working a ranch in Wyoming isn't as enticing.

"Our dude horses are used three months of the year, and they have to be able to navigate tough terrain in the Teton National Forest," she explains. "But this must be done over all-day rides with beginner to advanced riders in the saddle."

Second, we consulted with Dr. Emily Weiss, vice president of ASPCA Equine Welfare. The ASPCA manages The Right Horse, a program that advocates for horses in transition. The Right Horse is also a CHA partner.

"I'm an animal behaviorist," Weiss shares. "I worked in zoos for a long time, and now I focus on horses. I've had horses in my life since I was a kid, and The Right Horse joined ASPCA three years ago."

Finally, we reached out to the American Paint Horse Association's Dave Dellin, who serves as the organization's senior director of judges, shows, and education. APHA is also a CHA partner.

"Building relationships with reputable breeders, trainers, and judges, as within APHA, sets you up for success in horse-shopping as well as a way to develop other business opportunities."

Now, let's get you the information you need to find suitable horses for your business.

Tip 1: Hit Up the Industry Directories

Whether local as your own community saddle club or national as with a breed or discipline association, many of these types of horse groups offer member directories that can connect you with people who might be selling horses that fit your needs.

Dellin points out that APHA offers two online directories that might be helpful to peruse in your horse shopping: the APHA Professional Horsemen's directory (apha.com/programs/profhorsemen) and the APHA Judges' Directory (apha.com/showing/judges/directory).

"Both of these resources have fully vetted individuals who live up to APHA's standards in terms of how they do business and how they represent the association," Dellin says. Selected members of the Professional Horsemen's group agree to a code of ethics that encourages professionalism, integrity, and fairness throughout the industry.

The Judges' Directory consists of APHA officials who hold a judging card within the association. These individuals are also held to a high standard, and many overlap with the Professional Horsemen's list.



Your network runs far and wide, and you can build it even farther thanks to resources from the American Paint Horse Association and The Right Horse, both CHA partners.



An open mind goes a long way when searching for horses that will fit your program. Identify traits that you must have and those you're more flexible about to keep your options open.

Tip 2: Look for Partnerships

Stimmel's guest ranch has a core string of 32 horses, and they lease supplemental horses when needed. However, those horses are only used about three months of the year, meaning they could just be overhead expenses the remaining nine months. Instead, Stimmel built a relationship with a boarding school that takes a handful of her mounts during the off season to use in their horseback riding lessons.

"For the last five years, we've sent six horses to be used in the Orme School's horsemanship classes," she shares. "It took a while to build the relationship, but now the horses are used for roping, team penning, and trail classes in the school."

When working in a partnership with another person or business, Stimmel emphasizes the importance of a strong contract that covers who's responsible for what (feed, shoeing, general care, and unexpected veterinary expenses, especially).

"It's definitely not a handshake deal," Stimmel cautions. "It all has to be in writing."

Tip 3: Keep an Open Mind

"The Right Horse's focus is to change the perspective of who adoptable horses are," Weiss notes. "Oftentimes, instructors might think these horses are somehow different or broken—and some of them are—but most of them are just lost in transition. It could be transitioning from one career to the next, such as a show horse or dude ranch horse that's ready to transition to a trail or lesson horse. Just like every barn, some are super sound and some need some care. Engaging with horses in transition and having them in CHA programs means you get great horses for your program, and they potentially get someone primed who's ready for a horse of their own."

Most Right Horse Adoption Partners have trainers on staff that work these horses regularly and know what they can and can't do.

Tip 4: Work Your Network

As a horse-related business in your community, you employ the services of other horse-related businesses, both in your community and adjacent to it. Think about your farrier, veterinarian, shavings delivery driver, feed supplier, equine massage therapist, and countless other businesses you interact with that also interact with the horse community around you. When you're looking for horses, let people know. For the best results, be spe-

cific about your checklist. Instead of saying, “We’re looking for a unicorn—sound, sane, and cheap,” explain your real needs, such as low-maintenance, safe for kids, easy-keeper. When you let people around you know what you need, they can connect you with sellers who can fulfill your needs. Bonus: It also builds your network even further when you connect with other horse sellers in your community. They might not have what you need right now, but they could come across it next month.

Tip 5: Enlist an Expert

“I met a young woman who’s really active on social media and loves horse-shopping on Facebook,” Stimmel explains. “I give her a list of my criteria, and she starts looking at all the groups and pages she follows with horses for sale. I don’t have the time

or patience for that, but she really enjoys it and is good at it. When she finds one and I buy it, I pay her a finder’s fee for her time and effort.”

There are also professional brokers in many areas of the country who you can connect with to share your needs, and they can work their connections to find what you want.

“The trick is casting a wide net,” Stimmel adds. “Know what you want, develop a relationship, and be smart.”

Tip 6: Check MyRightHorse.org

When you visit MyRightHorse.org, the ASP-CA’s online equine adoption platform, you’ll find a wide selection of horses from vetted adoption organizations across the United

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States. You can use keywords to filter your search. Each horse on the site has a detailed description, location, basic bullet points, and an adoption fee. Many include a video for a detailed look at the horse's personality and way of going. You can also learn more about the rescue you'd be adopting from on each horse's page.

"Each group has its own adoption processes," Weiss explains, "but they're all groups that have met our 13-criterion process to partner with the ASPCA's Right Horse. We have about 40 full partners right now and other groups who we're helping to reach our standards."

Tip 7: Avoid Cold-Calling

"The more I know about a program—who you are, what you do—it really helps," Stimmel asserts. "Transparency is a must. Be

direct. Set a time to talk that's convenient for the potential partner, send some questions you'll ask so they can be prepared, and let them have time to look you up and learn about your program. They'll want to know what they're getting into and how a partnership could be mutually beneficial or if one of their horses for sale might fit with your needs. Going above and beyond can get you a long way."

Tip 8: Be Professional

In every contact you make within your network and as you build it, be professional. Be prepared to talk to people honestly about how you'll use the horses, how many hours they'll work each week, and your own barn situation. Finding the right matches takes honesty, transparency, and trust. If you show it, you're more likely to get it in your horse-shopping endeavor. 🐾



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