

Mowry, Tank in national spotlight

Catholic health publication visits facility

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KAY FATE

Step aside, Secretariat. Move over, Man o' War. It's time for Tank to shine.

The 29-year-old American Quarter Horse was on his best behavior last week – almost as if he knew he was on a national stage – even though it was business as usual.

Tank was visiting Benedictine Living Community in Owatonna, something he's done regularly for the past three years.

His owner, Monte Mowry, came up with the idea of the visits as he drove past the skilled nursing and rehabilitation facility each day on his way to work the spring of 2020.

Mowry and his wife Nancy own Mowry's Lazy Meadows, a farm just south of Owatonna that is home to six horses, including Tank.

It was the early days of the pandemic, and "I guess I did about the only thing I felt I could do, which was to give my time and share my passion for horses," Mowry said.

The visits were an immediate hit with everyone involved – so much so that Benedictine's executive director, Lisa Kern, nominated him for a pair of awards.

Earlier this year, he received the District F Volunteer Award from LeadingAge Minnesota, an advocacy group for seniors in the state.

Mowry also won the Horizon Volunteer Award, selected from a pool of nominees from the 45 Benedictine communities throughout the Midwest.

Since that first visit, the Mowrys have expanded their offerings. Last summer's cookout and classic car show at their hobby farm drew about 40 people – includ-



STAFF PHOTO BY KAY FATE

Tank, a 29-year-old American Quarter Horse, yawns during a visit to Benedictine Living Community-Owatonna. His owner, Monte Mowry, brings Tank to the facility multiple times a year for the residents to interact with, weather allowing.

ing a bus of Benedictine residents.

Eventually, word of his work traveled to St. Louis, Mo., the headquarters of *Catholic Health World*, the official newspaper of the Catholic Health Association of the United States.

Published semi-monthly in print and online, its audience includes policymakers, executives, administrators, trustees, and more across the U.S.

Lisa Eisenhauer, associate editor, liked what she heard, and traveled to Minnesota to learn more.

She and Janis Hooey, corporate communications manager for Benedictine, watched as Mowry and Tank delighted residents.

At 29, "he's an old man," Mowry said of Tank. "I figure there's about three (horse) years to every human year, so he's right in there with the resident," age-wise.

As Eisenhauer interviewed Mow-

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Casey Bakewell

Benedictine Activities Director

ry, he talked about his horse-owning great-uncle who was a Catholic priest years ago in South Dakota.

"Now I realize you're from a Catholic organization," he said, "but I like to say I come from a long line of horse's ... rear ends."

While Mowry's work and volunteerism was the focus, there seemed to be a second, underlying message.

"Can you tell me, generally, just the benefits of that human-animal connection?" Eisenhauer asked.

"I think people find it very comforting," said Casey Bakewell, activities director at the Owatonna facility, who frequently accompanies

Mowry and Tank on their rounds.

"One of the reasons the horse is so special, especially in this area, is that so many of our residents grew up with horses, grew up on farms," she said. "This brings them back to their childhood. In this kind of community, it really hits home."

The first time the pair appeared at the windows, Bakewell was surprised by how the residents reacted, she told Eisenhauer.

"There was such a connection, and the giggles ..."

That's just what Mowry was going for. "I'm amazed to see what just a small act of kindness means to



STAFF PHOTO BY KAY FATE

Lisa Eisenhauer, associate editor of Catholic Health World, interviews Monte Mowry about his volunteer work at Benedictine Living Community-Owatonna. The national publication will feature the story in an upcoming edition.

others," he said. "My mother tried to drive that into my head years ago and I finally 'got it.' I just wish she was here to experience it

with me, but I know she is here every step of the way. "The saying 'sharing is caring' rings loud in my world right now."



STAFF PHOTO BY KAY FATE

Tank draws a group of residents at every window during his visits to Benedictine Living Community-Owatonna. Watching his antics last week, from nearest the camera to the back, are Betty Schultz, Myrna Manti and Berneice Cobb. Monte and Nancy Mowry own six horses at Mowry's Lazy Meadows, and developed Ride for the Brand, using the animals to help people with special needs and to delight residents at the senior facility.