

SOUTHEAST SPOTLIGHT THE SANCTUARY

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Unique facility: The Sanctuary, a sports therapy and rehabilitation center in Ocala, features everything from a hyperbaric oxygen chamber to a 126-foot-long, 14-foot-deep saltwater equine swimming pool on its 26-acre property

Photo courtesy of The Sanctuary

A Sanctuary for the horse

Ocala facility offers advanced technologies and treatments for the equine athlete

by JoAnn Guidry

AT The Sanctuary, a state-of-the-art sports therapy and rehabilitation center, the focus is on the state of the equine. The 26-acre Ocala-based facility offers a comprehensive A to Z menu (AquaPacer to Zamar) of specialty treatments and therapies. The emphasis is addressing and healing the

ailments and injuries that are unfortunately the nature of the equine athlete and utilizing the most advanced medical technologies to reach that goal.

The first facility of its kind in the Ocala area provides a wish list of must-haves in the area of equine sports therapy and rehab: hyperbaric

The Sanctuary

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oxygen chamber, AquaPacer treadmill, cold saltwater hydrotherapy, P3 electromagnetic pulse therapy, Peg-

asus therapy laser, infrared light therapy, and Zamar hot/cold therapy. There is also a 126-foot-long, 14-foot-deep saltwater equine swimming pool, a five-furlong training track, two EquiGym free exercisers, and turnout paddocks.

The 40,000-square-foot main complex that houses the therapy equipment also consists of a 20-stall barn, a 70x200-foot therapy area and air-conditioned exam and conference rooms. Rubber pavers are installed throughout for safety. An additional 20-stall barn is located in the infield of the training track.

Like most good ideas, The Sanctuary's existence traces to necessity being the mother of invention.

"My wife, Amy, and I are longtime Quarter Horse breeders," said Tom Grabe, managing partner of The Sanctuary. "We had a couple of horses that had some physical issues and ended up having to have surgery. After the surgery, we brought them home, and they became lawn ornaments. The horses weren't happy with that, and neither were we. That's what got us thinking about getting them some physical therapy while they recuperated from the surgeries."

Grabe checked around to see what was available in the Ocala area and located a couple of equine swimming facilities. But the problem was that, because the large equine population in the area, all the swimming facilities were booked solid. Finally through word of mouth, Grabe was able to arrange to use a private farm's swimming pool for his horses. But

the experience made him think about bigger things.

"Ocala is a major equine center, and I knew if I had had trouble finding a swimming facility, then others had as well," Grabe said. "Then I started thinking about all the other kinds of equine sports therapies and what if there was a place in Ocala that offered those as well. I just had to believe that was something that would be welcomed."

Open for business

Two years later in September 2007, after the Grabes partnered with Tim and Ann Admonius and Ron Scott, the property for The Sanctuary was bought. The Sanctuary officially opened nine months later on June 28.

Located west of Ocala just off U.S. Highway 27 on Northwest Highway 225, the property had been a revolving door of breeding and training operations over the years. Ironically, the property itself was the initial rehab client for The Sanctuary partners.

"The basic infrastructure of the facility was good," Grabe said. "But we had to do major refurbishing throughout to get it to be the facility we envisioned. And, of course, once you get into those sorts of things, it always takes longer than you think it will. But we are very pleased with the end results and have been happy with people's reaction when they come to visit. People say they don't recognize the place from before when they drive up."

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While the facility was being remodeled, the partners were actively acquiring a staff and making initial contact with the area equine community.

Brenda McDuffee, who with husband Don owns and operates McDuffee Quarter Horses, was hired as general manager. Soon joining her was a staff of veterinary technicians, providing varied backgrounds, knowledge, and experience in a multitude of equine endeavors. There is no staff veterinarian for The Sanctuary, allowing for independent veterinarians to use the facility as needed for their clients.

"We felt not having a veterinarian on staff was the way to go," Grabe said. "That way there would be no conflict of interest, and we could draw a wider clientele base. We are here to serve the equine community and have an open-door policy to everyone."

"We like to think of ourselves as an equine Switzerland. We're neutral and open-minded."

**—Brenda McDuffee,
general manager of
The Sanctuary**

While The Sanctuary itself did not open until June, McDuffee and her veterinary technicians were out working in the equine community with their mobile unit in January. The mobile unit can provide Pegasus laser, P3 electromagnetic pulse, and Zamar hot/cold therapies. Not only were they visiting farms and training centers, but they also were a presence at the annual Horse Shows In The Sun (HITS) event that spends three months in Ocala.

"It was a great way to introduce ourselves to people and let them get a good sample of what we could do," McDuffee said. "Not only did we want to do some good and help their horses, but we hoped we would get them interested enough to come for a visit once we did open the facility."

Thoroughbred interest

Among those visited by The Sanctuary mobile unit were Thoroughbred horsemen Ciaran Dunne and Chuck Patton. While the Ocala-Marion County area is home to a large concentration of all horse breeds, Florida is second only to Kentucky in Thoroughbred foal production and is a major training center as well.

"We knew we needed the support of the Thoroughbred segment in the Ocala area," McDuffee said. "They are the majority here, are excellent horsemen and horsewomen, and are definitely 'show-me' people. We knew if we could show them that we can be of service to them that we would have made some good inroads."

Early indications are that the plan seems to have worked. Dunne and Patton have had initial positive experiences.

"I had a yearling with a leg wound



Water work: Technicians Maggie Carter, Korin Hullinger, and Kayle Kukla treat a yearling Thoroughbred colt with a shoulder injury in the AquaPacer water treadmill at The Sanctuary in Ocala

AquaPacer and hyperbaric oxygen chamber."

Water therapy

Instead of submerging a horse in water as the standard underwater treadmill does, the AquaPacer is a raised, glass-enclosed treadmill that the horse walks up onto. Then the water fills to the level necessary for the particular therapy; the speed of the treadmill and the water temperature also are customized. Akin to treading a mountain river current, the horse uses more of a full range of motion to get therapeutic, anaerobic, and aerobic benefits without the stress of impact. There is also less chance of the horse cheating since there is less buoyancy compared with a conventional underwater treadmill.

Hyperbaric oxygen therapy makes it possible for the horse to receive oxygen delivered at higher-than-normal atmospheric pressures while in the chamber. This allows a super influx of oxygen throughout the body, promoting the formation of new red blood cells, accelerating healing, and improving the effectiveness of medications.

"Our hope is that not only will people be willing to use these advanced therapies and treatments to heal their horses, but that they will use them as preventive measures as well," Grabe said. "Whether used for recreation or competition, all horses are athletes on some level and therefore they are going to have some physical issues. It makes more sense to treat these issues with some preventive therapy before those issues become a crisis. The way we look at it, it saves time and money, and it could save your horse." ↗

JoAnn Guidry is a Florida correspondent of THOROUGHBRED TIMES.

that just wouldn't heal," said Dunne, who with wife Amy owns and operates Wavertree Stables. "The Sanctuary people came out with the mobile unit, treated it with the laser therapy, and it finally healed. I think it's definitely a positive to have a facility like The Sanctuary here in Ocala. It enhances the equine services we already have here and gives horsemen another option to consider when it comes to therapy."

Patton, a veteran horseman who manages Peter Vegso's The Racing Edge farm, was no stranger to using advanced therapies.

"I've actually had a horse who was a bleeder treated with hyperbaric oxygen therapy at another facility and had gotten great results," Patton said. "So I think it's great that now we have a facility like The Sanctuary that offers so much right here in Ocala. My first experiences with them have been very positive. They used laser therapy on one of our horses with a splint and one with a very badly infected quarter crack. I was amazed at how quickly both horses healed and were back in training much sooner than I thought they would be."



While horsemen are familiar with laser and electromagnetic therapies, new technologies have made them even more effective. And the same technologies also have brought new therapies like the hyperbaric oxygen chamber, cold saltwater hydrotherapy, and the AquaPacer.

"It was our goal to have as many of these advanced sports therapies

and treatments as possible available," Grabe said. "Most of these therapies have been used or are being used with humans. Now they've been adapted for horses, and we think that's very exciting."

McDuffee added: "Therapies also change over the years and evolve into something else, usually, for example, into something better like the

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