San Antonio Express-News

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Fleet but fatally fragile



Miss Pretty Promises stumbles trying to stand after shattering her front legs at Retama Park.



ended Triple Crown dreams for Barbaro.

THE CRUEL REALITY

Metro Edition

■ Thousands of racehorses in Texas have been injured — and some euthanized — in relative obscurity, but sometimes a horse is hurt on a worldwide stage. Millions of people witnessed just how fragile racehorses are when the powerful colt Barbaro broke his hind leg in two places Saturday at the Preakness Stakes in Baltimore. Even with expensive breeding and the best trainers, leg bones can snap easily, possibly ending a horse's career — and even its life.

For more on the race, see Page 1C.

Grim fact is some track injuries lead to euthanasia for racehorses

By John Tedesco EXPRESS-NEWS STAFF WRITER

Pretty Promises collapsed near the finish line and struggled to rise on her shattered forelegs. A pickup rushed to the

A life-threatening injury at the Preakness crippled racehorse. Two men sprang out and shielded the filly from the crowd with a crinkled tarp as the vet went to work.

It was April 28 — opening night for live racing at Retama Park. In the stands, many people had gasped when horse No. 4 with the crisp yellow silks tumbled in front of them on the dirt track.

A covered trailer soon whisked the concealed horse away and onlookers clapped and cheered, as if they were rooting for a football player who was limping bravely off the field.

But Miss Pretty Promises never would run again.

Behind the tarp, Dr. Stewart Marsh had taken one look at the grotesquely twisted legs and saw there was no hope of recov-

With the same hands he had used to See DEATH/14A

check racehorses for signs of inflammation hours earlier, Marsh inserted a syringe into the filly's jugular vein and injected a drug to stop the struggling. He then administered a barbiturate to euthanize the horse.

"Both front legs were broken," Marsh said minutes later, shaking his head as he walked off the track.

There's no way to predict when that will happen, he said, and little hope the horse could have healed without aggravating the injury and suffering more.

Miss Pretty Promises is one of hundreds of racehorses in Texas that lose a life-ordeath gamble the public seldom sees.

At the state's five licensed tracks, Marsh and other veterinarians with the Texas Racing Commission have euthanized or documented the deaths of 300 horses in the past five years, usually after the animals broke ankles, legs or even spinal cords during races, according to the agencv's database of horse injuries obtained by

the San Antonio Express-News. Vets who scratched injured horses from

Official's ties to developer scrutinized

Ex-housing authority commissioner did work for Dallas firm.

First of two parts.

BY TODD BENSMAN EXPRESS-NEWS STAFF WRITER

In his unpaid role as a commissioner of the Housing Authority of Bexar County, Carlos Madrid Jr. portrays himself as an honest steward of public funds and unstinting advocate for the poor.

Having grown

up dirt poor on

the West Side,

Madrid says his

motivation for

spending

years



board on the was to provide the kind of good MADRID housing he believes can shape children into

productive adults. resignation letter, and it provides no hint that he gained much more from his board

work For the past several years, he has received thousands of dollars in contract work from a See HOUSING/22A

COMPANY PROFILE

- Founded in Dallas in 1993.
- Founder and president is Brian Potashnik, wife Cheryl is chief operating officer.
- Specializes in building high-quality, attractive and affordable housing funded in part by federal tax credits. Has formed partnerships with local agencies and nonprofits.
- Largest developer of government-subsidized affordable housing in Texas and San Antonio, with nine apartment complexes built or under construction in the area, and projects throughout South Texas. Has branched out to Arizona, Colorado and Nevada.

Dallas-based affordable housing developer that had business before the board. The developer found in Madrid an unwavering advocate.

Interviews and a San Antonio But Madrid has submitted his Express-News examination of housing authority records show Madrid's construction design company, MCMG Inc., did contract work for Southwest Housing Development Co. before the

NAGIN RE-ELECTED

New Orleans' controversial mayor (right) narrowly defeats challenger Mitch Landrieu in a runoff. 5A

Election also is a reunion

Saturday's vote brings longseparated friends back to the devastated Lower Ninth Ward. 5A



Army veterinarian from S.A. dies in Iraq

His next assignment was to have been at Fort Sam Houston.

By Sig Christenson **EXPRESS-NEWS MILITARY WRITER**

A San Antonio Army veterinarian was killed late last week along with three other soldiers when a roadside bomb detonated

near their Humvee. Lt. Col. Daniel E. Holland, 43, became the 17th serviceman from

San Antonio to die in Iraq. The Alamo City was to have been his next stop after completing a tour of Iraq.

"As an Army veterinary officer, he was well-known by the staff of the Medical Department Center and School," Fort Sam Houston spokesman Phil Reidinger said late Saturday. "And all were looking forward to his future assignment here teaching young soldiers with his proven skills as a leader, and ability to mentor and teach.

Details about the incident were sketchy and family members in San Antonio couldn't be reached

A Pentagon release said Holland and three other men were killed Thursday when an improvised explosive device, or IED, detonated near their vehicle.

The four were traveling with an Iraqi interpreter when their truck was struck at 2:30 p.m., according to U.S. Central Command. Officials with the Army in

Washington had no other information on the incident. A spokeswoman said more information about it would be released Mon-

The others were 1st Lt. Robert A. Seidel III, 23, of Gettysburg, Pa.; Sgt. Lonnie G. Allen Jr., 26, of

See SOLDIER/7A

High hopes for college often redirected low

Kids who are the first in their families to go hit barriers at home and school.

INSIDE

A shortage of information and support often leads good students to wrongly conclude four-year schools are beyond their

reach. 21A

BY JEANNE RUSSELL EXPRESS-NEWS STAFF WRITER

Andrea Aguillon and Nicole Gutierrez will graduate in less than two weeks as veterans of the same advanced placement classes, aspiring nurses in the elite top 10 percent of their high school class.

Their paths will take a sharp turn, however, after they cross the stage at Southside High School, a semirural, working-class school that serves Hispanic students predominantly.



LISA KRANTZ/STAFF

Gabriella Gonzalez, 17, a Southside High School senior bound for the University of Texas at Austin, plays with her brother Jesse Fujarte, 6

Both are eligible for spots at any of year university. the state's top public universities. Andrea will pursue a four-year degree at the University of Texas at Austin, but Nicole plans to start out at St. Philip's College and transfer to a four- See MANY/20A

Andrea is the unusual one.

Students who graduate in the top 10 percent of their high school classes

Today's Weather

Morning clouds High 94, Low 68 Full report, Page 16C



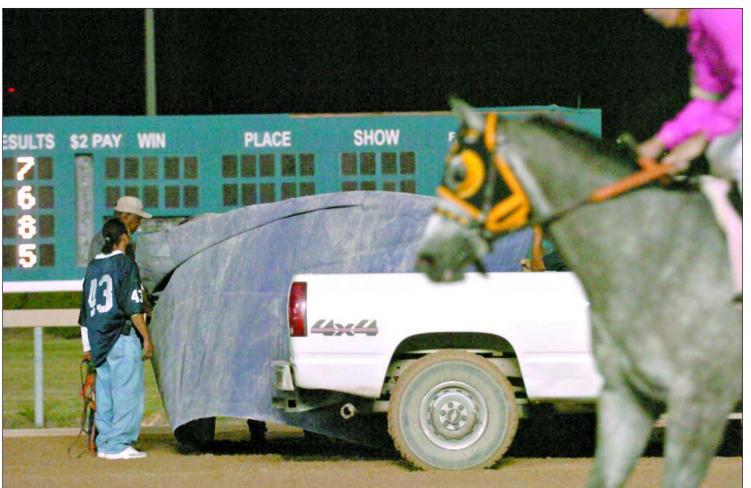


X	Business	1K
	Classifieds	1E
	Deaths	6B

Drive **Editorials** Metro/State 1B

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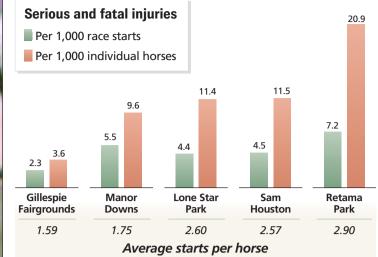




Serious and fatal injury rates

In the past five years, thoroughbreds in Texas have been seriously injured and killed at higher rates at Retama Park than other tracks.

A horse may start in more than one race. The rate of injury per horse declines at tracks with a lower average number of starts per horse.



Texas tracks

Gillespie Co. Fairgrounds (Fredericksburg)

Source: Texas Racing Commission records

Fatal: Results in

the horse's death.

Example: Broken leg

- Manor Downs (Austin)
- Sam Houston Race Park (Houston)
 - Retama Park (San Antonio)

Lone Star Park (Grand Prairie)

MARK BLACKWELL/STAFF

A racehorse returns to the finish line area as track personnel hold a tarp around Miss Pretty Promises, who was euthanized on the spot.

Death database reveals an ugly side to the sport

Types of injuries

and bruises

■ Minor: Short recovery

times. Example: Scrapes

CONTINUED FROM 1A

races and euthanized the grievously injured compiled the database, which never has been analyzed by outsiders.

While thousands of horses compete safely in Texas, the records reveal an ugly side to a moribund industry struggling to fill empty seats.

Even elite horses are at risk. At the Preakness Stakes on Saturday in Baltimore, favored thoroughbred Barbaro took a bad step at the beginning of the race and fractured his right hind ankle. By 7:30 p.m., Barbaro was being taken to Pennsylvania for an operation vets hoped would save his life, according to the Washington Post.

The injuries can be just as devastating in the lower-stakes world of Texas racing, far from worldwide spectacle of wealthy owners sipping mint juleps at the Kentucky Derby. Many trainers and owners have concluded the risk isn't worth the reward, and are fleeing Texas for richer purses in other

As attendance in Texas has dropped — from 1.6 million patrons at live races in 2000 to 1.2 million last year — purses have fallen as well.

Tony Lostracco, a horse owner from Weimar, said declining purses encourage owners to train and race horses at a younger age to make their investment pay off.

"They want to push these little babies," said Lostracco, whose quarter horse, Doctor Passmore, competed at Retama on opening night. "If you push horses before they're ready, they will break down.

But beginning in 2003, injury rates began falling in Texas. A possible explanation is that regulators reduced the number of race days to ease the burden on the animals.

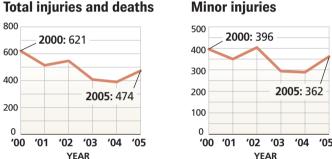
Speaking at an August 2001 racing commission board meeting, Mike Burleson, then-deputy director of racing, said vets were finding evidence that horses were being over-raced.

"We're seeing more tired, sore horses that are possibly increasingly susceptible to injury," Burleson told racing commissioners. "Therefore, our conclusion is that a slight decrease in racing dates will give these horses an opportunity to rest.'

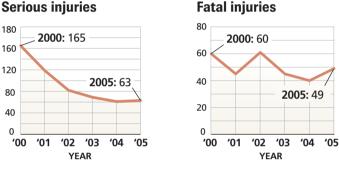
Five years ago, about 15 horses per 1,000 were killed or seriously injured in Texas. Last year, that rate had dropped by nearly half.

Injuries at all Texas race parks

Injuries among racehorses have generally declined in Texas, but in 2005 there was an upswing. Racing officials say their decision to cut back race days has given horses more rest and reduced injuries.



2000: 165 160 120 **2005:** 362 80 40



■ Serious: May take weeks

Example: Pulled tendon

to heal, or end a racing career.

MARK BLACKWELL/STAFF

bruises, and 550 pulled tendons, injuries that weren't immediately life-threatening.

Source: Texas Racing Commission records

600

400

200

days; they might not know if ris Day Animal League in Washracehorses come to the track ington who campaigns against with previous injuries.

Comparing Texas to other missions in other states track represent a fraction of all horses the health of racehorses differently — or not at all.

Some horses that are seriously injured and retire will start a new life as an adopted horse of a loving family, or breed future racehorses if they had successful careers.

The unlucky horses, according to activists and a 2001 study by researchers at Colorado State University, will be shipped to a slaughterhouse to be processed for meat. Two slaughterhouses are in Texas, not far from the Lone Star Track near Dallas.

The 300 deaths documented by racing commission vets could be the tip of the iceberg, since those are only the animals killed on race days, activists say.

"For thousands of racehorses that are bred, very few of them ever qualify to race," said Jerry Finch, president of Habitat for Horses, a nonprofit group near Houston. "So there's a number of them that never get to the racetrack, and many of them are slaughtered."

Fans admire the grace and of racehorses. They power gather like groupies at paddock areas to watch grooms and trainers saddle the majestic animals and prepare them to race.

Besides the deaths, vets docu- a crippled horse being injected mented 2,000 scrapes and with drugs to stop its breathing. They don't witness an unwanted broken bones and other serious horse being shipped to a slaughterhouse.

"There's a whole ugly side to The racing commission vets this that we just don't see," said work only at the tracks on race Liz Ross, a director with the Dohorses being slaughtered.

Racing officials say the injuvenues is difficult. Racing com-ries and deaths are tragic but that safely compete in Texas.

The screens used to conceal horses euthanized on tracks aren't intended to deceive the audience, said Jean Cook, a racing commission spokeswoman.

The purpose is to protect the patrons, the horse, and the vet stuck with a difficult task, Cook

Marsh, the racing commission's top vet, acknowledged the sport's unpredictable nature always will cause some horses to die behind a tarp.

said. "I don't think it's preventa-

The risk for racehorses is whether they'll come to a sad end. Each season, about one in 280 Texas horses doesn't beat the odds

On Aug. 2, 2003, a young quarter horse named Lovetostrawfly, owned by country singer Lyle Lovett, fell during the 10th race at Sam Houston Race Park. Blood oozed from the horse's

ear, and she couldn't stand on her limp hind legs — she had broken her back.

A veterinarian euthanized the 3-year-old horse on the track.

The sport is dangerous for jockeys, too. But horses don't Patrons are spared the sight of heal like people. A broken leg strewn path as the vets looked

that might put a jockey in a hospital for a week might be a death sentence for a horse. "The problem with healing

the horse, with the weight off

the bad leg, the other leg often suffers and flounders," Marsh Blood doesn't circulate well in the horse's lower legs, and when

a bad break ruptures blood vessels, gangrene can set in. Maimed horses could suffer for weeks and, in the end, have

to be put down. To spare horses that fate, Marsh and his colleagues euthanize many on the At Retama Park near San An-

tonio, a horse died, on average, every six days during the park's 67-day season last year.

What frustrates Marsh is that in many cases, horses that appear perfectly healthy end up snapping a leg on the track.

Horses like Miss Pretty Prom-

"It's part of racing." Marsh Opening night

On the outskirts of San Antonio during a gusty spring afternoon, storm clouds churned in the sky as Retama Park prepared to open its gates for the opening night of live racing.

At the stables, Marsh went to work. He and another racing commission vet, Gary Frakes, roamed from stall to stall examining all of the hundred quarter horses scheduled to race that

Frakes knelt beneath a 3-yearold horse named GP Braveheart and slid his hand along the forelegs for signs of inflammation. The horse's trainer then grabbed a harness and led the horse at a trot along a hayfor signs of lameness.

"The big thing I look for is a head bob," said Marsh, 61, who seemed at home in the stables with his cowboy hat, dusty boots colossal and belt buckle. Stitched on his checkered shirt was the Ralph Lauren brand of a horse and rider

A horse that bobs its head probably is hurt somewhere, Marsh said, and warrants a closer look

An injured horse is scratched from the race and barred from returning until a trainer can demonstrate the horse has improved.

"This is a very brief exam," Marsh acknowledged. But the vets are finding all but the most minor injuries, he insisted.

Although racehorses ripple with muscle, they travel about 35 mph on spindly legs.

Marsh walked up to a compact white horse whose veins popped out of its haunches like a bodybuilder's. He motioned at the knees.

"The majority of catastrophic injuries happen from here down," Marsh said.

The bones in the knees and ankles of some horses fracture, perhaps from overwork, perhaps from simple bad luck of landing a hoof wrong.

Once that happens, there is little hope a horse will recover, especially if the bone is exposed and open to infection.

Racing commission vets decide whether an injured horse has a chance to live or will be euthanized.

"It's extremely hard," Marsh said. "Some of the injuries are worse than others, like when the bone comes through the whole skin and the horse is walking on See VETS/15A

a stump of bone. That's very distressing." But according to the racing

commission's data, the horses that die often showed no signs of a problem. Their first and only injury noticed by a racing commission vet was so serious they had to be put to sleep.

"The catastrophic injuries are hard to figure out a rhyme or reason to," Marsh said. "If I could do it, I'd certainly not let those horses race that night."

A horse falls

The front gates opened and Retama quickly filled with the odd assortment of hard-core gamblers and laughing youngsters.

Old-timers scrutinized racing forms as children scampered near the track playing tag.

As the evening wore on, Longshot the Horse, the park's mascot, led a gaggle of kids in a spontaneous dance interpretation of "YMCA" by the Village People.

It was a day of quarter horse races — 350 yards at a full sprint. The speedy horses dart the length of more than three football fields in less time than a

30-second TV commercial. Many of the horses were meager purses.

Early on, one horse was scratched from a race. Officials were worried about signs of unruliness in Sixes Special Lad. Then the fifth race was de-

layed when Jo Jo's Leavin, a sorrel filly became fidgety in the gate and flipped over. Marsh was on hand and said the horse couldn't race.

Jo Jo's Leavin looked fine but Marsh said he had to be cautious. The vet was relaxed, even chipper. So far, not one horse was seriously injured. Things were going well.

Then it was time for the sixth race, a trial run with a \$2,500 purse.

The gates opened and a wall of horses launched into full gallop. As they hurtled toward the finish line within better view of the stands, some in the crowd thought horse No. 4, Miss Pretty Promises, was having trouble.

It was the first race for the 2year-old quarter horse and she lagged behind. Jockey Salvador Perez whipped the animal to squeeze more speed out of her. Horse and rider crossed the finish line in seventh place.

Miss Pretty Promises suddenly tumbled. The horse thud-

Maine towns horrified and on edge over a spate of pet murders

A dozen animals have been killed in the past six months.



Sam and Gracie never finished their last meal, steak laced with antifreeze.

The dog and cat, whose owners say they shared everything, even food, left a portion of the poisoned meat unfinished in the yard. Soon, both pets were struggling to walk. When their mals' anguished owners told the been deliberately killed stateveterinarian to end their suffer-

The poisonings horrified the small town of Stockton Springs, Maine, last month. The killer hasn't been caught, and local pet owners are on edge. Some residents wonder whether Sam, an 18-month-old Lab mix, was targeted for his occasional barking. The pets' owners, Ed and Brandy Miller, have begun locking their doors, even during the

Sam and Gracie were not the only Maine pets to die painful deaths, apparently at human mal control officer. kidneys failed and the fatal hands, in recent months. At

cause was diagnosed, the ani- least a dozen dogs and cats have poisonings in Stockton Springs wide in the last six months, including seven dogs believed to have been poisoned in Monson and Abbot, small towns northwest of Bangor.

Typically, three or four pet killings are reported in an entire year, said Norma Worley, director of Maine's Animal Welfare Program. The cause of the deaths in

Stockton Springs was confirmed when a piece of steak found near the dog's run was tested and found to contain antifreeze, said Lisa Sawyer, the local ani-

are connected to the seven suspected fatal poisonings more than 60 miles away in Monson and Abbot. Two more dogs in Monson were poisoned and survived, animal control officer Joe Guvotte said.

More than 100 miles away in the northern Maine town of Woodland, three other dogs were found dead last month, their bodies wrapped in plastic bags, officials said. One of the dogs, a Brittany spaniel, had been beaten; the causes of the other deaths haven't been determined.

Grossmith, 48, of Foxborough and Massachusetts, killing a pet was charged with fatally shooting his neighbor's dog, a Siberian husky named Kato, last month. In Rhode Island, police say Edgar Goulet of South Kingstown fatally shot his pit bull, Sparky, on May 1, and Richard Heines of Charlestown shot and killed a neighbor's Rottweiler in March.

Animal cruelty investigators don't know whether pet killings are increasing, because attacks are not recorded in a central database. Growing awareness of the problem and tougher animal cruelty laws may have led to an Attacks on pets haven't been increase in reporting of the Authorities don't believe the limited to Maine. Frederick crimes, said officials. In Maine ers" in the town of 650 people.

is a felony, punishable with up to five years of jail time.

Despite harsher penalties, some specialists say one kind of abuse appears to be increasing: retaliation attacks, typically launched by a neighbor of a pet that has trespassed, disturbed the peace or damaged property.

In Monson and Stockton Springs, several residents said they suspect the poisoned dogs were targeted by someone upset by their barking or roaming.

In Monson, Doug Villone, a former animal control officer, said some of the dogs poisoned there had been "problem caus-

15A

Some say the park's higher number of starts could factor in.



Stocky quarter horses like Miss Pretty Promises are injured at about the same rate at Texas' five racetracks. The picture is different with the sleek, fragile thoroughbred.

In the past five years, thoroughbreds were seriously hurt or killed at higher rates at Retama Park than other Texas racetracks, according to a review of racing commission records by the San Antonio Express-News.

For every thousand race entrants at Retama, about seven thoroughbreds pulled tendons, broke bones or were euthanized. About four horses were hurt or killed for every thousand entrants at the state's other busy tracks, Lone Star Park in Grand Prairie and Sam Houston Race Park in Houston.

If Retama's injury rate had been as low as the other tracks, about 70 thoroughbreds in San Antonio would have been spared a painful injury or death.

Researchers who study why racehorses are injured say it's difficult to pinpoint causes. Studies have concluded many factors, such as track conditions and the length of a race, affect the likelihood of a horse pulling up lame or collapsing.

Workloads are another possible factor. Thoroughbreds race most frequently at Retama, which has the highest average of race starts per horse in Texas.

At other parks, the averages are slightly lower — and so are their injury rates.

Retama General Manager Robert Pollock said the life-And when it happens, it hurts everyone — Pollock said he's

"Nobody's going to challenge your numbers. The question is, what do they mean and why are there differences?"

JORGE HERNANDEZ professor who has studied racehorse injuries

were euthanized.

Regarding the park's injured thoroughbreds, Retama's chief executive officer, Bryan Brown, sent a letter Friday to the Express-News that stated he was confident the higher rates weren't caused by any problems with the park's track surface.

"While we have a good idea why the rates you refer to at Retama are higher in our Thoroughbred Meet, we cannot say definitively," Brown wrote. "We do not want to speculate at this time.'

Racing commission spokeswoman Jean Cook wrote in an email to the Express-News that she couldn't draw any conclusions from the newspaper's anal-

"If one can't point to a determining factor in the higher rate, and back it up with more than speculation, I'm not sure what the point is," Cook wrote.

Jorge Hernandez, a professor at the University of Florida in Gainesville who has studied racehorse injuries, said the topic is always a sensitive one for the industry.

A study might find a difference in injuries among racetracks, Hernandez said, but it's up to policymakers to decide whether the disparity is a prob-

lem and why it exists. "Nobody's going to challenge your numbers," Hernandez said. "The question is, what do they threatening accidents are rare. mean and why are there differ-

held horses and cried as they jtedesco@express-news.net

Vets try their best to spot problems early

PUB DATE 05-21-06 OPERATOR JBINNEWEG DATE // TIME:

CONTINUED FROM 14A

ded into the soft dirt and flipped over, throwing Perez.

SAN ANTONIO EXPRESS-NEWS

Onlookers could see at least one of the horse's forelegs was broken and twisted at a sickening angle. Miss Pretty Promises trembled as she tried standing on healthy hind legs and useless front legs. In an awkward kneeling position, her nose was buried in the dirt.

The ambulance for Perez arrived first. A racing commission spokesperson said the jockey was uninjured and raced later in the evening.

Dr. Marsh and racetrack workers pulled up in the park's

'chase" vehicle, a pickup. The tarp was unveiled. The

minutes dragged by.

At trackside, Christa Betzing, a 23-year-old student from the University of Texas at San Antonio, waited anxiously. She hoped the horse was OK. Her friends kept needling her, saying Miss Pretty Promises probably was going to die.

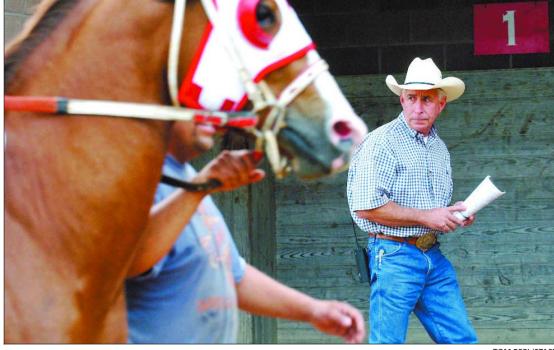
When told by a reporter that a vet likely was putting the horse down, she was shocked.

"They have to put them to sleep?" Betzing said. "You want to know how I feel about that? I feel absolutely horrible.' Her friends Walter Moore and

stride. It's an animal, they said, and people euthanize animals all the time. But the three college students had a ringside seat to Miss

Pretty Promises' final moments,

and even the guys admitted it was a bad way to go. "I can't get that image out of cials of hiding the truth.



"I can't get that image out of my head. It's very sad, seeing an animal in so much pain."

CHRISTA BETZING

after seeing Miss Pretty Promises suffer a fatal injury at Retama Park

Mike Pierce took the news in my head," Betzing said. "It's very sad, seeing an animal in so much pain.'

Nearby, Bryan Hellyer, 38, and Christy Fischer, 31, suspected the horse behind the tarp wasn't going to live. They fumed when a reporter confirmed their fears.

Hellyer accused racing offi-

"People don't understand what's going on here," Hellyer said. "It's a lot of fun to watch the horses run. But when they run and that happens, no one knows. They don't want us to know."

Retama Park track veterinarian Dr. Stewart Marsh checks the gaits of horses leaving the paddock for racing.

As the euthanized horse was carted away in a covered trailer, many in the crowd applauded jtedesco@express-news.net

and cheered. Children went back to playing games.

Marsh walked away subdued He and Frakes had signed off on Miss Pretty Promises hours earlier. Marsh recalled. The horse looked fine.

Then came the accident, and death at the end of a needle. Marsh said he'd never get used to it, even after 10 years as a racing commission vet.

The old horse doctor trudged toward the paddock. It was time to check a group of horses for the next race.

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