

Book Thrown At Paragallo

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The Honorable George G. Pulver Jr. has sentenced former thoroughbred breeder Ernest Paragallo to 2 years in jail, \$33,000 in fines, the maximum allowed under current law. A restitution hearing will be scheduled to determine monies owed to Equine Rescue Resource Inc. and Columbia Greene SPCA, for care provided to the malnourished and parasite infested horses found at Centerbrook Farm during April 2009.

“Your moral compass is out of kilter and points you in improper directions,” stated Pulver during sentencing. “Your sense of integrity, your code of conduct, your perception of right and wrong was perhaps formed by your days on either mean streets or Wall Street.”

On April 4, 2009, two severely neglected horses were removed from Centerbrook Farm by Colleen Segarra and Carolyn Otis of Equine Rescue Resource Inc. and transported to New York State Police barracks. There a complaint was filed by Segarra, which set the justice system in motion. Based on that complaint, the New York State Police, in conjunction with the Columbia Green SPCA, searched the Climax New York farm 4 days later and seized 177 horses. SPCA officials described Paragallo’s farm as “an equine version of a concentration camp”.

On Friday, April 10, 2009 Paragallo was arrested, charged and arraigned on 22 misdemeanor counts of torturing or injuring animals and failure to provide them with proper sustenance. "It's all my fault," said Paragallo when questioned, "I feel terrible."

The case was transferred from Coxsackie Town Court to Green County Court. “The animals were clearly neglected,” Greene County District Attorney Terry J. Wilhelm, said of the thoroughbred horses found at Center Brook Farm. Under the direction of Wilhelm, a grand jury heard the testimony of numerous veterinarians, humane organizations, farm employees and horse feed suppliers on August 5, 2009. The next morning, Paragallo was indicted on 35 counts of animal cruelty, reflecting 13 new charges filed.

The thoroughbred industry responded, with John Sabini, Chairman of the Racing and Wagering Boarding stating "There is no place in thoroughbred or harness track racing in New York for anyone involved in the callous neglect or mistreatment of horses". "The racing and wagering board immediately terminated his privilege to be involved with Thoroughbred racing in New York". The New York Racing Association, in December 2009, stated it would bar owner or trainers from racing if any of their horses were sold from slaughter.

On March 10, 2010 Paragallo was convicted of 33 misdemeanor animal cruelty counts in a non-jury trial.

The offenses for which Paragallo has been convicted fall under Article 26 of the Agriculture and Markets Law relating to Cruelty To Animals. Section 353 classifies his “failure to provide proper sustenance” as a “class A” misdemeanor offense. Maximum sentencing is \$1,000 and one year in jail for each offense, with jail not exceeding 2 consecutive years.

Segarra “wishes laws could be revised to include a felony charge in cases of extreme cruelty such as what occurred with Ernest Paragallo and 177 horses at Centerbrook Farm.”

Paragallo was led away in handcuffs immediately following the sentencing and his attorney, Michael Howard, has indicated an appeal is forthcoming.