

Statement from the Bell Canyon Equestrian Center Regarding Recent Incidents:

Over the past several years, the Bell Canyon Equestrian Center has undergone a notable revitalization, and has re-emerged as a gathering place for our community to enjoy the unique opportunities of “country-living” via our many magnificent horses. We have built a “one-barn” approach and have partnered with outstanding community-friendly trainers, so that we can all enjoy riding – from our Riding Academy for beginners through advanced-level equitation. We now have more Bell Canyon residents boarding their horses and enjoying riding lessons than ever before! If you’ve had the opportunity to attend our two recent community events – the Halloween parade and Spring Roundup—then you can surely relate to how special a place this has become.

Daily, community members stroll through the center, enjoying our beautiful facilities, horses, and each other. We are so excited to see our youngest to our wisest of residents spending time here. We welcome and encourage residents to continue visiting “the barn,” and our beautiful ponies and horses, and look forward to hosting even more community events.

However, in the last few weeks, there have been several disturbing and disruptive incidents at the equestrian center; two of these incidents have warranted the response of the Ventura County Sheriff’s Department. These incidents of harassment and intimidation by one resident have placed the safety and well-being of the horses, the boarders (many of whom are also residents), and our staff at risk. Additionally, these disturbances have interrupted Academy lessons and business activities. Some horse owners have expressed concerns for the safety of their horses.

Now, as a result, to protect the safety of the horses and to preserve the tranquil enjoyment of our facility for the boarders and residents who visit, the following rules are effective as of today on all BCEC property:

- No screaming, shouting, or refusal to give horse and rider the right of way.
- No disruption to horses in turnout (do not attempt to put a horse in the same turnout as another).
- Horses always have the right of way at the barn. Please be cognizant of this when walking your dogs.

Reminder: as is industry standard, no horse may visit or be housed at the BCEC unless he/she has been fully vaccinated against various equine viruses and proof of such vaccinations have been provided to the BCEC in advance of the horse visiting or moving to the BCEC. If a resident maintains a horse at his or her residence, please do not bring the horse to the BCEC’s facilities without first providing the BCEC proof that the horse has been fully vaccinated (Effective April 2020).

Additionally, The BCEC has added additional security measures, including aisle cameras, to increase protection for the horses, boarders, and staff.

Please let the BCA entry station officers know immediately if you see something suspicious, especially during evening hours.

Lastly, we are incredibly proud of the BCEC and the programs offered, the facility as a whole, and the high level of horse care provided. In fact, we have glowing letters of recommendation from two well-respected equine veterinarians commending the BCEC's programs, facility, and overall care of the horses. These veterinarians have spent a great deal of time at the BCEC and know our horses well. Copies of the letters can be found on the BCEC website (insert link).

Thank you for helping to keep the BCEC a safe and peaceful place for Bell Canyon. We look forward to seeing you!

Stonewall Equine
PO Box 6262 Thousand Oaks, CA 91359
805-402-1403

August 6, 2022

To whom it may concern,

I am the veterinarian for the Bell Canyon Riding Academy as well as several individual boarders at the Bell Canyon Equestrian Center. I am writing to speak to the quality of care received by these horses.

All of these horses are vaccinated, dewormed, have routine physical exams and good dental care. They receive routine farrier care as well. They each are supplemented based on their individual dietary and veterinary needs. They are housed in appropriate stalls that are cleaned daily and well bedded. Many of the stalls even have fans and fly systems. The stalls are on average larger than those at most facilities. The horses have access to turnout and exercise daily. Stall waterers are cleaned routinely to always provide access to fresh water. One patient even has an installed water softener to help address a veterinary issue. They are fed good quality hay in adequate amounts which is reflected in their appropriate body condition.

On average, these horses receive better care than most. Some even receive monthly chiropractic and massage treatments. I am always notified if there is any abnormality or concern for any horse's well being. As a veterinarian, I appreciate the willingness of Lisa, Ashley, Dakota and Adrienne to always go above and beyond for the horses.

In addition to excellent care, the horses are very loved by everyone at the facility!

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cait Zacha". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cait Zacha DVM

MEMO

On 6 August, 2022 I stopped by the Bell Canyon Equestrian Center to inquire about the availability of a suitable “lesson” horse that I could ride 2-3 times a week. The horse I had been riding regularly at a different location had been retired and a replacement not located yet. During the following conversation I was informed by management that some claims had been made concerning perceived “abuse” of the horses under care at this facility. I was asked to offer an opinion, in my capacity as a veterinarian, in that regard. I spent the next hour doing a walk through inspection of the entire facility. My opinion follows - both as a veterinarian and as a resident.

Background: From about 1985 to 2005 I had 1-2 horses continuously in residence at this facility. I have witnessed at least 4 different managers and many different trainers with a variety of different styles and priorities. I have been a resident of Bell Canyon since 1997. I view this facility as a unique community asset that, with proper management, adds significant value to each of the over 700 residences in this community - on a national basis. For several years I participated competitively and have been to at least 10 (or more) neighboring facilities in the general southern California area so feel I have some industry awareness of generally accepted standards. I have been in continual practice as a veterinarian since 1972.

The generally accepted signs of neglect (or poor husbandry) such as overgrown hoofs, open sores, unthrifty condition, tangled manes and tails, dropped food, and embedded sweat stains and so forth are totally absent. All horses observed were in above average condition. Some horses, as they age, will inevitably show signs that may be confused with poor care. In the past there have been some at this equestrian center that were essentially just living out their lives and actually received daily visits from their owners. There are none presently on site in such a window so no grounds for confusion should exist in this regard.

A physical plant that is prime for accidents and/or injury (both human and equine) may also be considered “abuse”. This is not the case here. All barns, gates, fences, kick rails, and so forth are in good repair. There are no gross wash outs or holes to step in. Operational “clutter” is at an absolute minimum for such a facility. Roof overhangs protect the main barns alleyways from rain. The “mare motel” has roof gutters that direct rain run off away from the stall area. Grading is such that the actual stalls in either location will not be swamped with run off water.

Vermin (rats, mice, etc.) were not observed nor was there visible evidence of their presence. Bait traps of a safe construction were observed and judged to be of an adequate number and suitably placed. A built in automatic fly system is in place and augmented by additional fly strips and bait bags as necessary. The level of observed fly activity on my visit was judged to be minimal at that time.

Several large fans were observed to be operational in the barn area assuring a reasonable attempt at turnover of stagnant air. Many of the stalls have communicating windows or have been doubled up (enlarged) that aid in air circulation and also the horses mental stability (herd animals).

There are suitable turn out pens with at least 4 horses observed in them during my midday visit. Halters and lead ropes for each horse were visible.

All waterers were found to have clean, fresh, water in them. Several were augmented with buckets at the owners discretion.

No stagnant standing water (mosquitoes) was observed

All stalls showed evidence of recent mucking with clean, fresh bedding in place. All manure was obviously fresh.

The large storage yard (hay, shavings, manure haul offs, etc.) was judged to be adequate and suitably organized. This is an operating entity so there is always an ebb and flow in this regard.

The horse population currently on site is well within this facilities capacity. In fact it could be increased to some extent with the current managements attention to detail; however, there is a balancing point that should be observed.

Physical abuse. There is certain reality in dealing with any large animal that is hard to define. These horses are often in the 1,000 lb range. They can put a hoof in your pocket before you can blink. They are fight or flight. They have all manner and level of training (or lack there of).

The use of many historical devices such as lip or curb chains, war bridles, twitches, lunge lines, lunge whips and a variety of riding crops, and even spurs can all be misconstrued as abuse. In fact they actually can be abuse if used incorrectly or excessively; however, they can also be an essential part of our safe interaction with these animals if used appropriately. In most cases both ends of the lead rope need training. There is sometimes a fine line in this regard. I am not aware of there being any issues along this line.

In the Bell Canyon Equestrian Center environment almost all activities take place in a highly visible manner by all types of “witnesses”. There are currently many children and novices present on a daily basis that will voice their concerns, should they have any. These may often be emotional responses but I believe they are real. In this regard I would suggest some sort of an “incident” report be created that would assure a review process be available, if appropriate. Could this be abused - politically, out of spite, etc? Time would tell. It is conceivable that an individual horse may not be a suitable in the Center environment. In this case it would have to be kept at home or elsewhere.

In regards to managements request for my opinion I have not personally seen or heard of any current incidents that could be considered as abuse.

Almost all facilities require current vaccination compliance (or proof thereof) and have some sort of quasi quarantine period on entry - to the best of their ability. It is virtually impossible to be fool proof in this regard. However that is no reason to not have some policy in place. The Bell Canyon Equestrian Center does not operate in a vacuum. It has a regional “reputation” it has to maintain to continue to be a distributed value to the home owners. It also has a responsibility to those that are existing boarders. There are many fine equine veterinarians in the area. They are certainly more current on prevailing issues than I am. In that regard I would have one of them help draft your policies or keep you advised of current concerns.

Based on what I have seen today I feel that any claims of abuse to the horse at Bell Canyon Equestrian Center are baseless and in fact probably deleterious to the community in general. If the issues can not be identified with clear cut examples or documentation that can be dealt with on a point by point basis it seems like some sort of cease and desist would be appropriate.

7 August, 2022

Robert M Buffum, DVM