



## **PRESS RELEASE**

**APRIL 3, 2023**

### **RETIRED POLICE HORSE CONTINUES COMMUNITY SERVICE THROUGH THERAPEUTIC RIDING**

The Friends of the Bethlehem Mounted Police have donated George, one of the first horses on the Bethlehem Mounted Patrol, to Equi-librium, a therapeutic horsemanship center in Nazareth, PA. After 10 years of service with the Bethlehem Police, George is onto his next career as a therapy horse, participating in programs for individuals of all ages with physical, developmental, and behavioral challenges.

George started his career in 2010 with the Mounted Patrol, having come from Ontario, Canada at the age of five. He successfully completed his training to become a Police Service Mount, and could often be seen patrolling all areas of the city to include Bethlehem's Historic Downtown and Southside Arts Districts. George quickly became a staple within the community, as he served the citizens of Bethlehem with distinction for the next decade.

"We are beyond thrilled that George can continue helping the community he so dutifully served with such an incredible organization as Equi-librium," says Michelle Kott, Chief of Police, City of Bethlehem Police Department.

"George excelled throughout his career and stayed dedicated to his service up until his final patrol. While his ultimate retirement was an unfortunate loss to the citizens of Bethlehem, it also comes bittersweet," says Ryan Danko, Mounted Patrol Unit, City of Bethlehem Police Department. "George has always shown an eagerness to work, and Equi-librium will be able to provide this in an entirely

different capacity. We could not have found a more fitting home for him, and we know George will continue his service to others with his head held high.”

While George’s job at Equi-librium will look much different than his days on the police force, his training and demeanor make him a perfect fit for therapeutic riding programs. George enjoys attention from volunteers, stands patiently for participants and instructors, and is unphased by his surroundings, which makes him a safe and steady mount for riders of all abilities. His large stature also allows him to be the perfect horse for adults and taller participants.

“George is a proven asset to our program,” says Kimberly Gapinski, Equine Operation Director, Equi-librium. “With his larger size and exceptional training, he is able to accommodate larger and taller riders more comfortably.”

George began his therapy horse training in December 2022 with Gapinski. He learned to stand at an accessible ramp, walk slowly and responsively with volunteer leaders, and go through the obstacles and activities on Equi-librium’s sensory trail. George made his debut in volunteer lessons in January, and is now fully integrated into adaptive riding lessons this Spring.

In addition to settling into lessons, George has made new equine friends at Equi-librium who are also on their second careers. He shares a pasture with Chef, an ex-show horse who previously traveled to Renaissance Faires, and Lito, a former harness racer who was born in France.

George and his new friends are part of a herd of 14 therapy horses at Equi-librium, an organization with over 40 years of history providing equine-assisted services to individuals with special needs in eastern Pennsylvania, and the only center in the Lehigh Valley to hold a premier accreditation from the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH) International. Located on a historic 18-acre farm in Bushkill Township, Equi-librium welcomes over 100 individuals to participate in programs each week, including adaptive riding lessons, therapeutic carriage driving, and equine-assisted learning.

Friends of the Bethlehem Mounted Police (FBMP) was incorporated as a 501(c) 3 not-for-profit organization in 2012 to support the reinstatement of equine law enforcement in the City after its 65-year absence. Having celebrated their 10 year anniversary in 2022, and funded entirely through generous community support,

the FBMP enthusiastically continues their mission to acquire, train, house, and supply equines to the City of Bethlehem Police Department's Mounted Unit, for their use in law enforcement and community engagement.

Both organizations are thrilled to collaborate for the first time as two of the most prominent organizations in the Lehigh Valley utilizing horses to help the community.

"On behalf of our Board of Directors, and the team of volunteers who dutifully cared for him, we at Friends of the Bethlehem Mounted Police, are honored and proud to continue to fulfill our mission with much gratitude to our community for their support," says Diane K. Mack, President, Friends of the Bethlehem Mounted Police. "We are equally proud to retire George to Equi-librium, allowing him to extend his stellar skills to their therapeutic riding programs, and begin another career serving his community."

"We are so grateful to the Friends of the Bethlehem Mounted Police for the opportunity to give George a meaningful retirement from service that will still allow him to make a difference every day," says Jessie Shappell, Executive Director, Equi-librium. "We have a responsibility to everyone who has grown to know and love George over the years to ensure he has all of the love and care he deserves, and we know that's exactly what awaits him here."

To support George's care in his new home, please visit:

<https://www.equi-librium.org/our-horses>

To support the Friends of the Bethlehem Mounted Police, please visit:

<https://www.bethlehemmountedpolice.org/>

*For media inquiries pertaining to this release, please contact Jessie Shappell, Executive Director, Equi-librium, at [jessie@equi-librium.org](mailto:jessie@equi-librium.org) or 610-365-2266.*