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Horse Rescued from Cistern in St. Croix After Community Rallies to Save It

From concrete saws to backhoes, tools and teamwork were vital as St. Croix Rescue, Reliable Rentals, Senhouse Trucking, Cruzan Cowgirls, Nick's Scenic Equine Tours, and others joined forces to free an injured horse stuck in a water-filled cistern.

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A horse trapped for hours in a cistern on St. Croix is lifted to safety as the island unites behind a powerful act of compassion and teamwork. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM

On Wednesday morning, quick thinking and coordinated community action saved the life of an equine member of the Virgin Islands community.

According to St. Croix Rescue Acting Chief Jason Henry, his group was alerted by a social media post from Jennifer Olah, founder Cruzan Cowgirls Horse Rescue, asking for assistance. He assembled his team, and they arrived at the Candido Guadeloupe Terrace housing community to find a horse in distress.

The animal had somehow fallen into a cistern through a hole in its top cover, and the injured horse was now trapped. With the equine unable to be pulled or lifted out of its predicament by human hands alone, the team of rescuers quickly realized that mechanical support was needed. “At that point in time I recognized ‘okay, we’re gonna need a concrete saw, we’re gonna need jackhammers,’” Mr. Henry said. “I literally started to call and order additional resources.” Straps, medication. Mr. Henry ran home to grab tools and a generator. Rescuers began to cut through the concrete and rebar slab that was trapping the animal. Once they had made a large enough hole, volunteers went down into the cistern to soothe the terrified horse and prevent it from further injuring itself with any hasty moves in the murky water.

The horse was wrapped in hefty straps as best as the rescuers could manage, with Mr. Henry indicating that even a spare body bag had been deployed to fully secure the large animal. Once that was done, 18-year old Ricky Senhouse, whose family owns Senhouse Trucking, used a backhoe to lift the horse out of danger.

“I thought the cistern would have been a weaker cistern, where I could just use the teeth and just pull it out,” Mr. Senhouse said. “Come to see, it’s like six inches thick and it has rebar in it and everything.” Facing a more difficult task than first anticipated, Mr. Senhouse expressed gratitude that the rescue team quickly coalesced around a leader to guide his efforts.

That leader was Folksy A. Yovanovich Burgess, who was at the forefront of efforts to get the horse out of the cistern. “I have a lot of horses of my own, and we deal with this stuff,” she said matter-of-factly. “And no-one will help unless someone else starts helping,” Ms. Burgess opined. However, she insisted that it was the collective effort of everyone involved on Wednesday that ensured the positive outcome of the animal’s misadventure. “We had the Fire Department out here, we had St. Croix Rescue. We had Reliable Rentals, Senhouse Trucking, I’m with Nick’s Scenic Equine Tours,” Ms. Burgess disclosed. “We had Cruzan Cowgirls down here, countless locals down here, tons of other people – I don’t know their names, but they helped a ton,” she continued.

With the horse now safely out of harm’s way, Mr. Henry said the next order of business is to secure the top of the cistern to prevent anyone – or anything – else from falling in. “Home Depot donated some concrete screws and some plywood,” for the task at hand, he disclosed, thanking store management for their immediate assistance upon receiving a request for help. “We need to secure this, so it doesn’t happen again,” Mr. Henry declared.