

ONE OF CULVER'S MOST BELOVED HORSES DONATED TO THERAPY PROGRAM

Tom Coyne
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PATTON IS A VETERAN OF FOUR PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURAL PARADES

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Marlene Karman came to Culver Academies hoping for a miracle. She found one in a 29-year-old gentle giant of a horse named Patton.

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Karman, executive director of **Holistic Riding Equine Therapy** (<https://www.holisticridingtherapy.org>) in Homer Glen, Illinois, was troubled because she had some special needs teenagers who were too big to ride the 14 horses she has.

“That broke my heart,” she said.

She was camping in Tippecanoe River State Park, about 20 miles southwest of Culver, when she suddenly had the idea that maybe Culver Academies with its large herd of horses might be able to help. She told people at the campsite she planned to drive to Culver to talk to someone.

“Everyone told me, ‘It’s Saturday, no one will be around at Culver,’ ” she said.

Her 83-year-old husband, Art, who had planned to go to Culver until his father died when he was a teenager, told Karman he didn’t want to go because even after all these years it brought back painful memories.

“I told him, ‘They have horses. I know they have big horses. I’m going to see if there’s a snowball’s chance if they have a horse that they need to retire that would have a great cushy retirement job’,” Karman said. “He looked at me and said, ‘You are crazy lady, but I’ll take you there.’ Then he said, ‘Nobody’s going to be there on a Saturday.’ ”

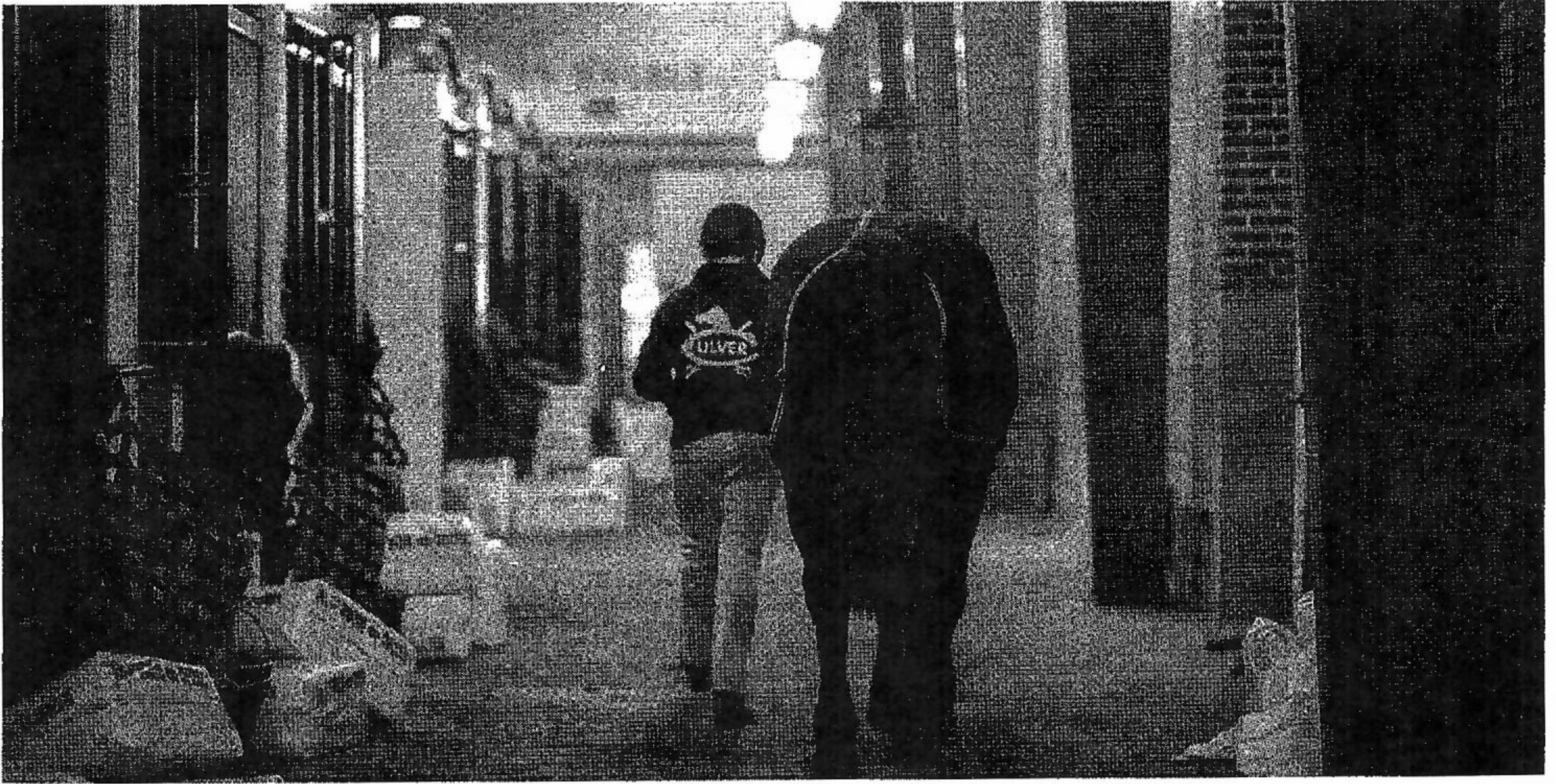
The Karmans arrived at Culver on Oct. 8 and there were cars everywhere. It was Parents Weekend. Parents were in town visiting their children and attending classes with them, Eagle Stadium was being dedicated and, most importantly for Karman, there were horse jumping, rough riding, and polo exhibitions going on at the Vaughn Equestrian Center.

She went to the equestrian center and sat down behind the emcee, who happened to be Capt. Sean “Skip” Nicholls, Culver’s director of horsemanship. When he finished talking, she started talking.

“I said, ‘I’m with a nonprofit.’ And he thought, ‘Oh, she wants money.’ I said, ‘I don’t want money. I just want to know if you ever have one of your larger horses who’s healthy and needs a real cushy retirement job being walked around and pampered by kids.’ ”

“I said, ‘I just want to give you my brochure.’ ”

“He said, ‘Wait a minute. I’ve got a horse.’ ”



Capt. Sean "Skip" Nicholls leads Patton out of the Vaughn Equestrian Center.

That is when Nicholls walked Karman downstairs to the stables and introduced her to Patton, one of the most beloved horses in the Culver herd. Patton has taken part in four presidential inaugural parades, but Culver is upgrading its herd and Patton was ready to retire.

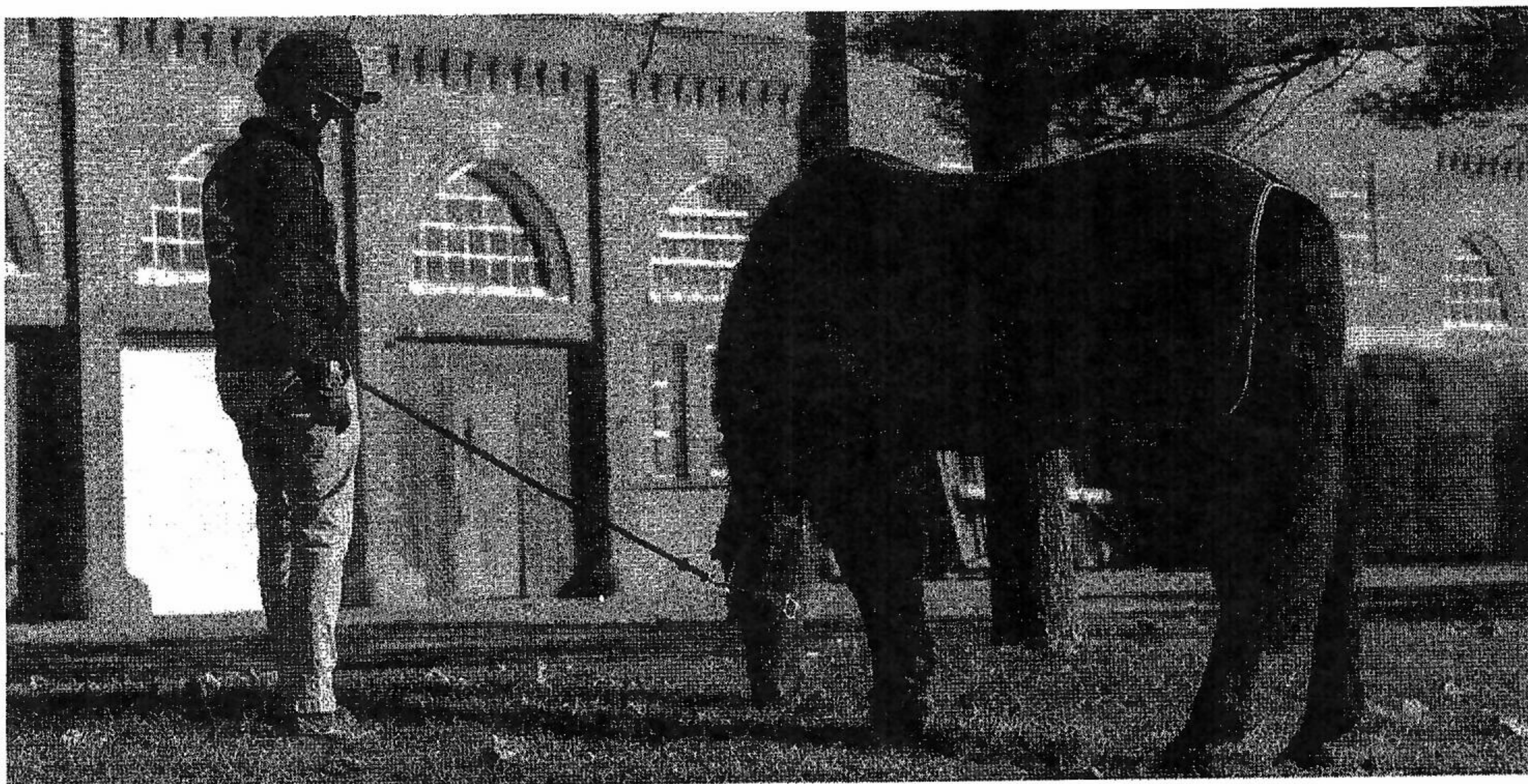
“He’s been a great all-around horse and a favorite with the kids,” Nicholls said. “He’s dependable in all scenarios. He’s great for beginner riders. He’s good for intermediate riders. He’s terrible for advanced riders because he is lazy.”

He will be the ideal horse for Karman’s program, which works with people of varied physical, emotional, cognitive and social abilities. Her horses are less than 15 hands tall and weigh about a thousand pounds. She needed a horse that could carry teenagers that weigh between 190 and 250 pounds.

Patton is a breed of draft horse called a Percheron that is 17 hands tall and weighs about 1,700 pounds. He will have no problem carrying large students.

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“It's like riding a couch,” Karman said. “He’s perfect for kids who have no core stability because he’s patient and has this big, huge, wide back. It's almost like having a support chair.”



Capt. Sean "Skip" Nicholls with Patton outside the Vaughn Equestrian Center.

Renata Heinsen '92 SS'89, an instructor of horsemanship, said Patton has “come to be revered as the ‘grandpa’ of the stables, and he tells his stories through his calm demeanor as a steady mount for first-time students and parade riders continually over the years.”

“In the Rough Riding program, Patton brought confidence and balanced riding skills to all levels of riders and was a favorite in Team Roman Riding, even jumping small obstacles with riders standing upon his back in his younger years,” she said.

She said he was willing to always trust all who gave him kindness, care, and patience.

“His favorite treat has always been molasses horse cookies, and he would smack his lips and salivate like Pavlov’s dog as you were retrieving them from pockets to give to him,” she said. “This was always a sight that made all giggle.”

Karman is hoping to find a sponsor to help pay to feed Patton, who has a voracious appetite. But she is elated to have him.

“It’s just been one miracle after another,” she said.

Members of Culver Academies horsemanship program gather to see Patton off to his new home.

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