

BellaVia Stables second location is right in the heart of Saddlebred country off Todd's Point Road.



# A Beautiful WAY to LIVE

BY KATHERINE HANSIL

We all dream about being able to retire in that special place. People dream of the beach, the mountains, maybe a small town on the Amalfi Coast. For horse owners, they also make plans for their four-legged family when their show or lesson career comes to a close and that is where Heather DiGiannantonio's BellaVia Stables comes in.

DiGiannantonio has been in horses pretty much her entire life. As an eight-year-old she began riding with Jeff Nevitt in her hometown of Grand Blanc, Michigan. Later she attended William Woods University for Equine Studies and then settled in Kentucky where she worked for many years at Rob and Sarah Byer's Premier Stables training, showing and caring for many champion American Saddlebreds.

When she decided it was time to make a life change, it just so happened that Mary Gaylord McClean was retiring He's Taylor Made. When McClean was looking for somewhere for her gaited partner to receive that extra care, the lightbulb went off for DiGiannantonio. Her home had a seven horse barn that was going basically unused, and she had great turnout area, so BellaVia Stables was born. As the business grew, DiGiannantonio looked for another property and lucked into a



We Must Be Nuts and Military Secret munch on the lush grass while they are out for their morning exercise.

beautiful barn with pastures at 2000 Todd's Point Road right in the middle of famed Saddlebred country.

"She's got two places and they're both beautiful," said Mary Gaylord McClean. "I've got He's Taylor Made where Heather lives and he absolutely loves it there because he can be by himself. He can go from his stall right out into his paddock and then come back in anytime he wants and stand in front of the fan for a while. He loves being by himself and it's perfect for him."

Now armed with a total 22 stalls and lots of lush, grassy paddocks, DiGiannantonio has lots to offer. With Tom Parsons, who relocated to BellaVia in the fall of 2020, the two care for some great horses and ponies, each having an individualized feeding and care program. DiGiannantonio explained "everyone enjoys turn out and pasture time and then they come inside. It is a natural segue from their show careers."

DiGiannantonio and Parsons give each horse and pony their special time each day – imagine a spa day every day! They explained, "we want him to be happy,

healthy, and within an inch of a model weight for a horse of our breed. Other than the fact that they are retired from showing and not in training anymore, everyone basically enjoys a show horse level care regime but in a retirement environment. We want their time with us to be a 'thank you' for being such a great horse at the end of their careers. That's how we feel about all of our horses and ponies.

"We are so grateful that people like Grace [Arnold], Mary [McClellan], and Amy [Dix-Rock] trust us with their beloved horses."

Gaylord commented, "I've got two older horses at the other place that need a lot more care. Heather is very knowledgeable and treats every horse as an individual. They all get different feed, different hay, whatever it is that works with their situation. She is so smart about that kind of stuff. I'm really proud of her and totally trust her with my retirement horses. She does a great job!"

BellaVia has branched out from just retirement care and now offers layup care also. Most recently Amy Stinnett's

Kalarama's Studious Girl became a resident. Stinnett is "thankful to have somewhere to send this special mare while recovering from an injury. She needed such specialized care with stall rest and hand-walking and Heather has been amazing taking care of 'Elle.'" Stinnett added, "She is in as good of order as when she was in training."

The list of residents is a special one. In addition to He's Taylor Made and Kalarama's Studious Girl, superstars including Regal's Lightning Strike, Heartland Rough And Ready, Military Secret and We Must Be Nuts make their home at BellaVia. They have also enjoyed the company of great horses CH Callaway's Kit Carson, owned by Susan Shepherd, and Amy Dix Rock's homebred That's Exactly Right, both who were snowbirds this winter.

After great careers it seems only fitting that our horses and ponies deserve their beach or mountain retirement. With the practices that DiGiannantonio has put in place that is just what her BellaVia Stables offers – a beautiful life for our four-legged family.



BellaVia is also home to Dutch Warmblood Orión, who was Nancy DeMaeyer's Dressage partner.



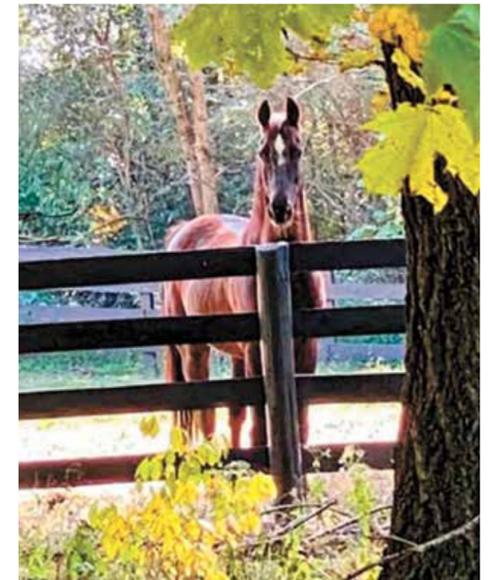
Every place has to have a mascot. Waylon serves not only as BellaVia's mascot but also as DiGiannantonio's trail horse.



Amy Dix Rock homebred That's Actually Right enjoyed being a snowbird at BellaVia over the winter.



Heather DiGiannantonio with Regal's Lightning Strike and Tom Parson with Heartland Rough And Ready, two of the Hackney residents that have become best buddies.



BellaVia's first resident, He's Taylor Made, enjoys his time out in the paddock daily at the original location.