

The Press DEMOCRAT

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Dave Herrera of Petaluma, a member of the San Francisco Police Department, unloads Mounted Unit retiree Justice on Friday at his new home in Sonoma.

HAPPILY OUT TO PASTURE

SF police horse retires to Sonoma ranch after years patrolling city streets, parks

By TIM TESCONI

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Justice, a retired police horse from San Francisco, kicked up his heels Friday after being placed in a paddock at the 40-acre Sonoma ranch where he will spend the rest of his life.

For the past six years, Justice, a strapping Tennessee walker, patrolled Golden Gate Park and pranced down San Francisco streets during St. Patrick's Day and Chinese

New Year parades. But on Friday the bay gelding officially retired from the San Francisco Police Department's Mounted Unit and moved to the green pastures of Wine Country.

"After providing tremendous service to San Francisco, police horses like Justice come to this beautiful ranch instead of being sent to slaughter. It's a retirement life they deserve," said Sgt. David Herrera, a member of the SFPD Mounted Unit who delivered Justice to the Sonoma ranch.

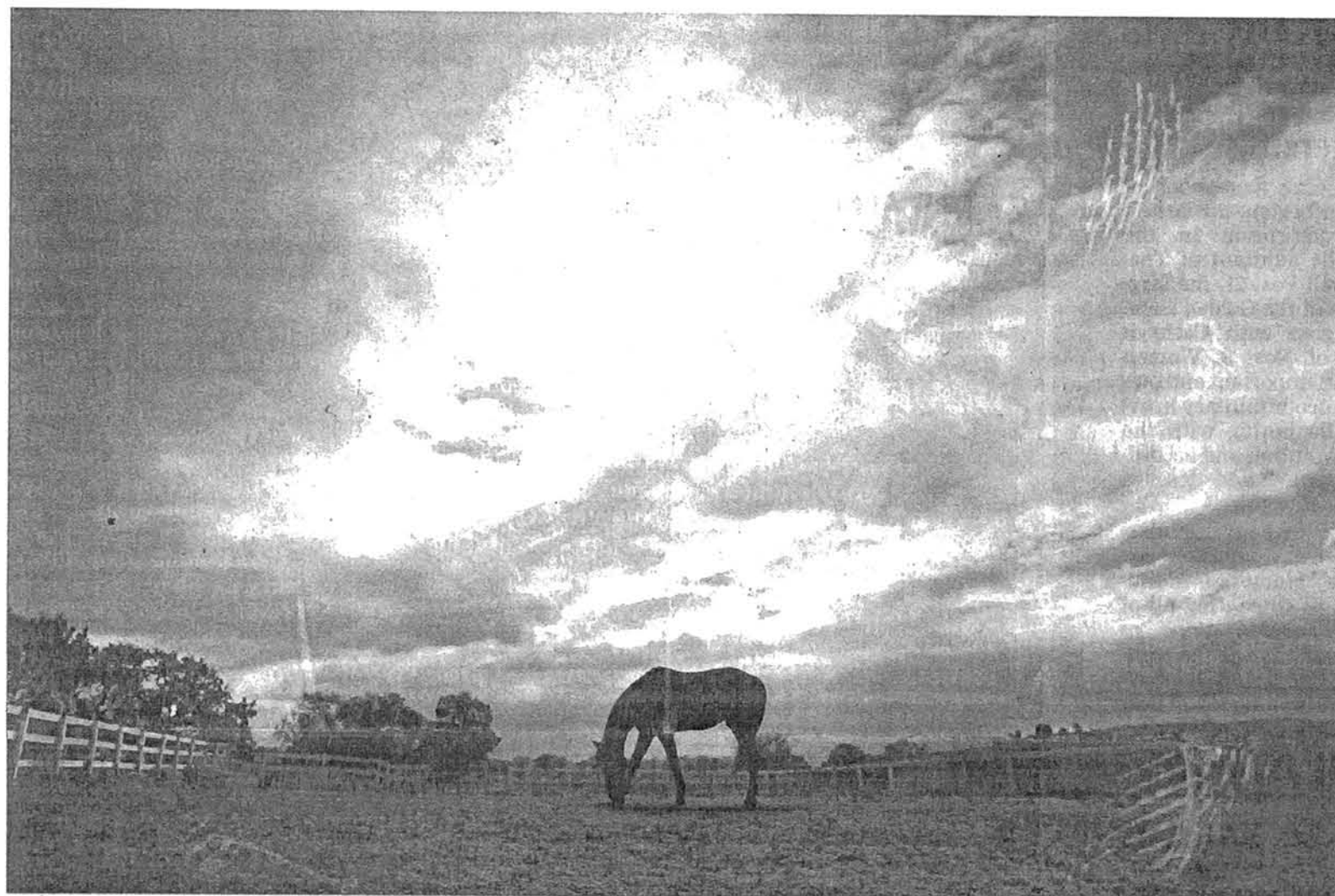
For the past 18 years, the ranch in southern Sonoma County has been the retirement home for San Francisco police horses no longer able to

work the urban beat. Retired horses are officially turned over to San Francisco's Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which uses members' donations for their care at the Sonoma ranch. Since 1918, the SPCA has provided for the retirement of police horses at ranches in rural counties around San Francisco.

Now, because of the benevolence of the ranch owner, the old horses come to Sonoma County to live out their last years in pastures of plenty.

"This is the ultimate place for a horse that has worked all of its life," said Daniel Crain, president of San Francisco's SPCA, who was at the

TURN TO HORSE, PAGE B3



Justice, who was just retired from the San Francisco Police Department Mounted Unit, grazes Friday at his new home in Sonoma.

HORSE: Equines have run of ranch, get veterinary, farrier care

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Sonoma ranch for the horse handoff. "We want to take care of the animals that have spent their careers serving the people of San Francisco."

Crain estimates expenditures range from \$800 to \$1,000 a month for the seven retired horses living at the ranch. Justice joins Charlie, General, Tom, Smokey, Valiant and Wes in retirement.

Crain and police officials requested the ranch's location not be revealed because the property is an animal sanctuary not open to visitors. Law enforcement officials also worry the horses could be hurt by criminals with a grudge against the Police Department.

The scenic ranch is horse heaven. The aging equines get special feed mixtures, alfalfa and oat hay. They have the run of the 40-acre ranch and get routine veterinary and farrier care. Once the horses are here, no one ever rides them or tightens a girth around their stomachs again.

San Francisco has nine police officers in the Mounted Unit. It's such a coveted assignment police officers often wait decades to become part of the unit.

"It's the crown jewel of assignments,"

said Herrera, a 29-year veteran of the department who waited 24 years to get on a police horse.

There are 12 police horses in the unit and all are stabled at facilities in Golden Gate Park. Herrera, a Petaluma resident and lifelong horseman, said American quarter horses are the preferred breed because of their disposition, versatility and athletic conformation.

On Friday, there were brief ceremonies transferring Justice from the ownership of the SFPD to the SPCA. Herrera and Officers Annette Carrier and Charles Ellis, also of the Mounted Unit, led Justice off the horse trailer to his new home. They brought a bale of his favorite hay and the halter printed with his name.

"Justice gets two scoops of grain and two flakes of alfalfa in the morning and one flake in the afternoon," Herrera tells Justice's new caretaker.

Herrera said it's easier parting with the retired horses knowing they will be well cared for on the ranch.

"You just know when it's the best thing for a horse to retire. Being a police horse is a stressful life," said Herrera. "Justice served San Francisco well and now it's time for him to be here in Sonoma."



Justice gets a kiss from Daniel Crain, San Francisco SPCA president. The organization takes charge of police horses once they are retired from the force.