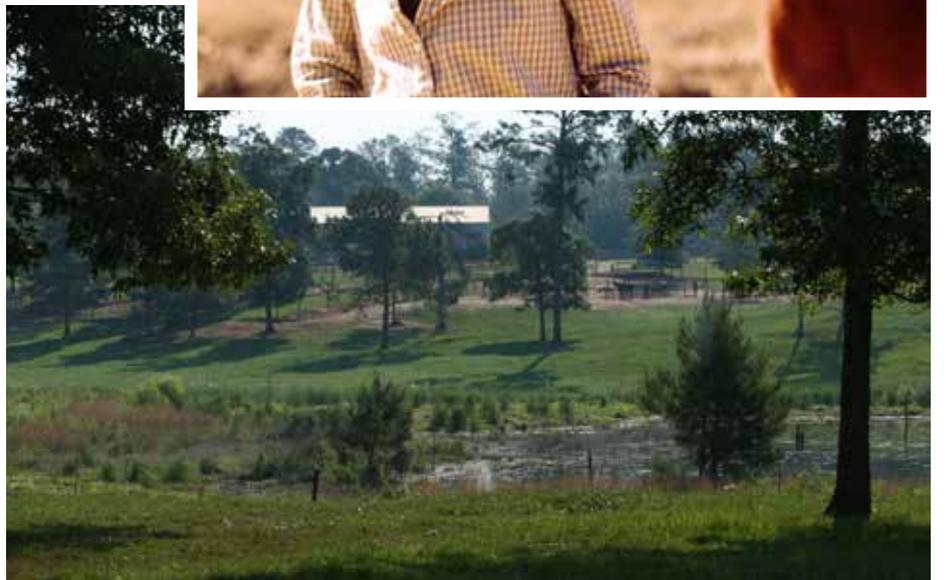


Colthill Crescent Arabian Horse Farm

A shared passion for a distinguished horse drives this Folsom farm.



Just down the winding rural road from the transplanted giraffes and zebras at the Global Wildlife Center in Folsom, Louisiana, yet another exotic breed finds its home. At Colthill Crescent Arabian Horse Farm, the high-spirited Arabians roam rolling hills and verdant pastures under the careful watch of Mike Cimino and his staff.

Cimino, a New Orleans police officer for almost thirty years, imaginatively laid out his retirement plan in the mid-nineties, pairing a lifelong interest in horses with an indomitable work ethic—"I'm not a couch potato," he explained.

When he left the force in 2004, he and his former wife Marc moved out to Folsom and opened Colthill Crescent, named after a street in Scotland where Marc had once lived. After a visit to Arabians, Ltd. in Waco, Texas, the couple fell in love with the breed and soon populated their farm with Straight Egyptian Arabians.

Ten years later, Cimino continues to live out his dream, deriving joy from the day-to-day on the farm. "I can't imagine not being able to wake up every morning and stick my face in a horse's neck and let them nuzzle. They're four-legged Valiums—the greatest in the world."

Cimino's admiration and passion for his equine charges is evident in both word and action. Whereas the nomadic Bedouins, initial caretakers (and devotees) of the Arabian, would bring the horses into their tents at night, Cimino and company elect for a modern analogy, installing cameras in the two foaling stalls on the property, where expectant mares await their new arrivals. Once it's clear that delivery is imminent, Cimino calls for assistance.

For him, the process has yet to grow stale. "When the mother and baby look at each other and nicker for the first time—it's so heartwarming."

In 2006, Cimino was joined by his nephew Joe Ellis, who set about transforming his rodeo background into a profession as a horse trainer. One Sunday afternoon at a party, Ellis impressed guests by getting a new horse "in saddle" in under forty-five minutes. "Not one buck," recalled Cimino. "He reads horses better than anyone I've ever met."

Jeanette Beard rounds out the staff, aiding Cimino in his daily duties and helping to train the young horses in their stalls, distinguished by her ease and confidence. "She shows a real knack with the babies," said Cimino.

Horses bred by "The Colthill Gang," as the farm and its clients are known, have sold to breeders around the world. At horse shows, such as the Egyptian Event in Lexington, Kentucky, the world's largest showcase for the Egyptian Arabian, Colthill Crescent stands out among the crowds. "People know when we're there," said Cimino.

Back at home in Folsom, the farm hosts a Learning Day twice a year to increase exposure for the animals, educating guests on the background of the horse as well as the benefits of owning one, as both a "significant addition to the family" and a source of income.

The Egyptian Arabians boast a pure desert heritage, extending back thousands of years. "If you can read Sanskrit," said Cimino, "you can trace the lineage of every horse on this farm." Even a cursory look at the creatures' physical features hints at

their arid origins. From the concave profile of its nasal bone and its large nostrils to its sleek underside and high-carried tail, the Egyptian Arabian has evolved its own cooling system.

The horses display high endurance as well. "They won't win a sprint against a thoroughbred, but the Arabian will last longer." Horses from Colthill Crescent have gone on to compete in polo, barrel racing, and team penning, among other activities. One graduate, Abba Amhar, regularly partakes in twenty-five-mile races at the ripe age of eighteen.

The multi-purpose Arabians are intelligent and gentle, as well as easy to train, rising handily to challenges. Cimino worked as a teacher before entering the police force, and he compared the Arabians to gifted children acting out in the classroom. "If you bore the horses, they get cranky."

At Colthill Crescent, the daily goal is to promote and nurture their Egyptian Arabians. For the Colthill Gang, this task involves not just breeding and training but a dedication to the individual creatures. "Some people view horses as disposable income," said Cimino, shaking his head. "If you think that way, you don't have a heart. You have a thumping gizzard."

In retirement, he has transformed a personal interest into a decade of devoted work. Sharing his unique passion brings contentment to Cimino. "The biggest thrill has been creating a family. The horses have brought us together." ♦

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