

WINNER'S CIRCLE

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Aftercare

BY EVAN HAMMONDS

KING FOR A DAY, a Brunetti family's Red Oak Stable homebred, wasn't the only honoree in the Pimlico Race Course winner's circle after the May 18 Sir Barton Stakes. The Earle I. Mack Foundation, as lead sponsor for the race to benefit the Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance and the Man o' War Project, honored U.S. Air Force senior master sergeant Tei Pascal.

Pascal, who lives in the Bronx, New York, and suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), got involved with the Man o' War Project after returning home from her last tour of duty.

"I told myself I wanted to start doing the things I love when I returned from overseas," Pascal said. "London was my last duty station, and when I arrived in New York, I said, 'Why not? What better time than now to learn how to ride horses?' When I was at the Bergen Equestrian Center, I saw a flier for the Man o' War Project and thought it would be perfect because I had been dealing with some PTSD issues.

"I called up Columbia University and told them I was in, and it took off from there."

The Man o' War Project is a joint venture of the Earle I. Mack Foundation and Columbia University Irving Medical Center that explores the benefits of equine-assisted therapy in the treatment of veterans with PTSD.

"Thoroughbred aftercare is one of my life's passions, and the collaboration with a group like TAA is a natural fit for the Man o' War Project, which depends on retired Thoroughbreds," Mack said. "Together our groups will show that life after racing is one full of promise and positivity, and can assist one of our most important

AFTERCARE ASSIST

Air Force vet honored by Man o' War Project at Pimlico

communities, our veterans."

Despite being from nearby Harrisburg, Pa., Pascal was making her first visit to Pimlico.

"I had been to racetracks when I was in the military," she said. "I went to Newmarket when I was in England and that was the cream of the crop. Coming here, I met with Earle Mack and was invited here through Anne Poulson."

Poulson, president of the Man o' War Project, was at the track with Pascal, along with TAA operations consultant Stacie Clark Rogers and Erin Shea.

"My experience has exceeded my expectation," Pascal said. "With the Man o' War Project I really felt as if everyone has shown compassion and empathy. They made it very clear that healing was their number one priority. I understood that healing was something that I could sustain long term, and that was important to me. Part of the skills I am learning is about rebuilding relationships and maintaining those relationships. What I got from it the most was trust, learning how to trust myself, trust people again. That was very important to me as a mother of two.

"Everyone is so welcoming and embracing me because as a veteran suffering from PTSD, the stigma is out there, but I'm realizing that people don't care; they just want to help," she said. "I have to remember that for myself. That stigma is just in my head and I can take the experience from the Man o' War Project and move forward. Connecting me to the horses is something I love.

"I'm here to speak on behalf of veterans and let them know, it's OK. Yes, the stigma of PTSD is out there, but that stigma only lies within ourselves. That's why I'm here: to let them know they're alright and not by themselves." ■



Tei Pascal

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