



NEW PACT WILL GUIDE USE OF CITY STABLES

A horse enthusiast who runs a concession fears for the future of the equestrian center

By Deborah Manog
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EMOGENE Yoshimura calls her 25-year operation at Koko Crater Equestrian Center a labor of love.

"I'm passionate about sharing the joy of horses with other people," said Yoshimura, who has been an avid equestrian and loyal patron since the stables opened in 1962.

Yoshimura secured her first concession contract in 1990 and has since offered trail rides and lessons and hosted equestrian events for the community. With her current contract now expiring and the city accepting sealed bids for a new five-year contract, Yoshimura said she is worried about what the future holds for the center.

For one thing, the new lease officially forbids riding horses along a 2-mile loop in the neighboring 60-acre Koko Crater Botanical Garden. The trail has been off-limits, city officials said, since 2008 after complaints of horse droppings and plants being trampled.

"Most thought it'd be the trigger for the concessionaire to have guidelines on how to run the trail," said Elizabeth Reilly, vice chairwoman of the Hawaii Kai Neighborhood Board, regarding the off-limits loop. "Something more needs to be looked at or at least (we need) an opportunity to find out, how do we get it open?"

While horses trot along several trails within the center's 10-acre site, Yoshimura said she and other equestrians miss riding through the lush garden.

"Boarders used it to cool off their horses (on the garden loop) after working them" on the arenas and track, Yoshimura said.

Initially, terms of the new contract also banned lodging or sleeping on the grounds. Yoshimura, who has a caretaker stay on the grounds in a house, objected to a city plan to instead have a 24-hour security guard to mind the horses.

Yoshimura, a veterinarian, argued that proper horsemanship requires a trained horse handler to monitor the animals at all times. She said that one night the caretaker told her the horses were "going crazy" due to strong wind rattling the roofs.

"Horses are powerful animals," Yoshimura said. "If there was no one here (with training), they might've killed themselves in their stalls because they're so frightened."

On Feb. 9 the city issued a revised contract with more open-ended phrasing. It requires the property to be staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by qualified staff members to ensure the well-being of the animals.

A city official said the change was prompted by concerns that the previous language in the contract was "too restrictive."

If Yoshimura, who is among several applicants who have submitted a bid for the stables, is not picked as the stables concessionaire, she will have three days to clear out her belongings, including 30 horses, a tractor, saddles and other equipment.

The deadline for sealed bid submittals is Feb. 27,

and the city is expected to select a concessionaire by March 1.

Yoshimura said she hopes the city chooses someone who will continue to maintain the stables.

"If I don't get the bid, it would be tragic, but I could live with that," Yoshimura said. "But if this place is not awarded to anyone and it closes up, that to me is a disaster."

The concession for the stables at Koko Crater Equestrian Center, above, is up for bid. The current proprietor, Emogene Yoshimura, below, is critical of new contract requirements prohibiting riding horses on the Koko Crater Botanical Garden trails.



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