

FIRST TRF GRADUATION AT WATEREE Five inmates have graduated from the "Second Chances" program at the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation's farm at the Wateree River Correctional Institution in Rembert, South Carolina. The five are the first to complete the program, which aims to turn former inmates into productive citizens who can find work on area horse farms when they are released from prison. Graduation ceremonies were held at the facility and each student was presented with a Groom Elite certificate. "This is the key to the future of your life," former warden John Carmichael said at the ceremonies. "You did it yourself and I congratulate you on that." Sgt. Tim Amerson, who runs the program, said that he saw a difference in his students once they began working with the retired race horses. "Many of the guys have told me, 'For a moment, I forgot where I was,'" Amerson said. "It gives them a peace working with these animals. Regardless of whether or not they'll ever use it, it does wonders for them serving their time here." Several of the inmates in the program have said they hope to find work in the equine industry after leaving Wateree. Said graduate Ernest Marino, "Being responsible and maintaining a schedule is paramount to this career and its success. This course has definitely opened new doors in career opportunities for me, some I am sure to act upon. Being with the TRF has been a blessing that I will cherish always." The program at Wateree was made possible by Carmichael, Columbia, S.C. attorney John S. Rainey, TRF-South Carolina President Kip Elser and TRF-South Carolina Vice President Donna Freyer. Those involved in the Second Chances program will work to help the graduates find jobs on South Carolina horse farms. The Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation is the nation's oldest and largest horse rescue operation and currently cares for about 1,300 retired race horses. Founded in 1982, its dual goals are to save as many retired race horses as possible from slaughter while helping to better the lives and futures of prison inmates.