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'The best parts of my Bowie are disappearing'

By ERICA LANCASTER Special to the Blade-News
Published 08/12/10

The Maryland Horse Council has initiated the Save the Horse Farms campaign and Prince George's County is supporting that with its own committee. Whether you have touched or ever wanted to touch a horse, I ask you to help. Why? Because horses are dying in Bowie. Farms are dying in Bowie. The end of open space, agriculture, and the rural parts of our suburbia are here. I am Bowie; I was raised here and I've chosen to raise my two daughters here. But the best parts of my Bowie are disappearing.

Unless the people of Bowie fight to hold on to what Bowie has been; unless we demand some things stay, are protected, then we will lose all of our rural potential. Once all the land is developed, it's gone for good. Can Bowie be inspired to care; to fight? Do you, should you, care about the end of all agriculture, the end of all farms and horses?

I was blessed with my upbringing. It allowed me to graduate public high school as a merit scholar. High school allowed me to meet Jackie Joyner-Kersey and Bill Cosby while competing at the Meadowlands and Penn Relays. Being successful in the classroom and on the track allowed me to become a division one athlete. Then when my running days ended, I graduated cum laude during the recession of the '90s. And all of that allowed me to land a job that paid 30 percent more than the average college grad in 1995.

Now it's 2010 and we're in another recession. Could a Bowie child today follow in my footsteps and get a 30 percent jump in their earning potential? I want that for my daughters, for all Bowie children. But the very experiences that allowed me to excel are disappearing.

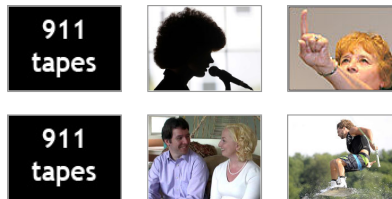
See for yourself: It's 1972 and I'm Bowie born, bred and raised. Next it's 1978 and I'm having my first horseback riding lesson at the Bowie Horse Center. But you can't have your first lesson there. The land is now 80 homes in the Patuxent Riding subdivision off Race Track Road.

It's 1981 and we move my pony to a lesson barn that specializes in children. I have my first horse show at a farm off Queen Anne Bridge Road in Bowie. But you can't have your first horse show there. Today some of the land appears fallow, some has corn and some has been subdivided.

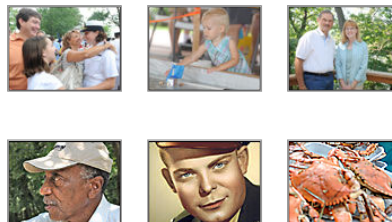
It's 1986 and I have a dream. We sell my pony and buy my dream horse. He lives at Federal Hill Farm just across from Pointer Ridge in Bowie. But you can't keep your horse there. It's now the subdivision aptly named Federal Hill Farm consisting of 33 residences.

Then it's 1990. I start teaching riding lessons at Fair Weather Farm off Queen Anne Bridge Road. I'm sorry, I can't give you a lesson there now. The owner moved the farm to Charles County because

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- Aug 21** - AAUW Used Book Sale Collection Day
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- Aug 28** - Fearless Yoga



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of the cost of living difference. But the financial reprieve was short lived and the riding academy has since closed.

It's 1992 and I am the camp counselor for Loftmar Stables summer camp located off Central Avenue in Bowie. I hope your kids are enrolled for this summer because next summer it might not be here. The 25+ acres have been for sale for the past year offered at a high of \$2.9 million and is currently listed for \$1.7 million.

Question: Do you expect a farmer to buy the Loftmar property or a developer?

Back when I was showing my pony, I won a Horsemanship Award. Can you guess what happened to the place I showed at the most? We/you/our predecessors saved it - it's Show Place Arena. Before I realized agriculture, open space and horses were disappearing our Prince George's County politicians did. And they did something about it in a way that is helping us today.

Every farm that has been converted to homes has added to the property tax. And yet, in our 300+ year history those additional funds have *never* solved our financial woes; have *never* been enough to fund our public school system so we don't have to lay off teachers (like now) or have furlough days (like now) or watch class sizes increase (like now).

A thought, let's do something different with the acreage we have left: *Don't* build houses. We have over 300 years of history proving that more houses will not make us enough money. What about a solar energy farm or an organic vegetable farm or a working farm/halfway house for those trapped in the juvenile justice system? Maybe you have a better idea. How much money would we, the Bowie government, save if the solar energy was used to power our schools? Would our children be healthier with local, organic vegetables in their school lunch? Can working the land, growing produce and feeding yourself give a troubled kid a different perspective? Can it create confidence and competence?

Horse racing died at Upper Marlboro. No horses run. No bets are made. But the land from the former racetrack is useful now *and* for the future. First there were horse shows, then it became a destination for graduations, and now trade shows call it home (no pun intended but have you been to the home show?). And what will we use Show Place Arena for next? Who knows? That's the point. We've still got options, for now and for the future.

Today our farms are in trouble. Our open space is in trouble. Example, the Bowie Racetrack is in trouble. The promises the owners made were not kept. The clubhouse was not restored, instead it was demolished. So there are no bets placed and no taxable revenue generated for us. Our racetrack could do more for Bowie. Do you know how many acres are inside a 1-mile racetrack? Do you know that the land inside Bowie's infield is just sitting fallow? Should we bring live racing with betting back to Bowie? Would an equine training facility partnered with Bowie State University have greater value?

Bowie, please think about our options. A cityscape has less potential for change compared to a rural one. When the future brings new opportunity, we have more options with our rural sections saved. Horse farms, agriculture and open space are pleasures Bowie still has but in short supply. City conveniences we have aplenty. Bowie, I invite you to care about our resources while we've still got them. Let our local politicians know that you care. Save our agriculture. Save our open space. Save our horse farms, for now and forever.

The writer is a member of the Save the Horse Farms Committee.

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FREDERIC YONNET
 with Mike Phillips
 Friday, August 27
 8pm

BLACKBERRY SMOKE
 w/ Pete Best Band
 Sunday, August 29 at 8pm

8.20 CHARLIE MARS w/ Jimmy Owen Youngs
 8.21 THE RIPPINGTONS
 8.22 BONNIE PRINCE BILLY & THE CAIRO GANG
 8.23 SCOTT KIRBY BAND (Guest from Key West)
 8.24 BEAUSOLEIL AVEC MICHAEL DOUCET
 8.25 PRESSING STRINGS w/ Alan Peters
 8.26 PAUL THORN w/ Patrick Sweaty
 8.28 JUDY COLLINS w/ Amy Spence
 8.31 CHRIS DUARTE & GUITAR SHORTY
 9.01 ILO FERREIRA
 9.02 IN GRATITUDE
 A Tribute to Earth, Wind & Fire
 9.03 MARCUS JOHNSON
 9.05 SHILTS & MATT MARSHAK
 9.08 THE MUSIC OF ABBA with ARRIVAL FROM SWEDEN

8.22 MIXFEST with TRAIN, BACKSTREET BOYS, HANSON & MORE!
 8.24 JACKSON BROWNE w/ David Lindley
 8.27 TREY SONGZ w/ Monie
 8.29 BLONDIE + CHEAP TRICK
 8.31 BUDWEISER SUPERFEST
 w/ Neil, Anthony Hamilton, Ben, Lenny, Ruben, Dwayne
 9.03 THE O'JAYS & RON ISLEY
 w/ special guests Larry Lancaster & Ray Rite
 9.04 REO SPEEDWAGON & PAT BENATAR
 9.10 PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION
 9.15 CROSBY, STILLS & NASH

Rodrigo y Gabriela
AUGUST 30
 w/ special guest Lee Ostin