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"Cowboy's Hope for Horse Day"**

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NEWSMAKER

Cowboy's hopes for horse day ride on history, Bush

A CLOSER LOOK

Name:
Dennis Reis

Age: 44

Occupation:
horse trainer

Notable:
seeking creation
of a national
"Day of the
Horse."

Quote: "The
time is right
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President Bush
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By **TIM TESCONI**

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Sonoma County cowboy Dennis Reis is riding high on an ambitious plan to establish a national observance honoring the American horse, an animal he champions as a noble living link to our nation's history.

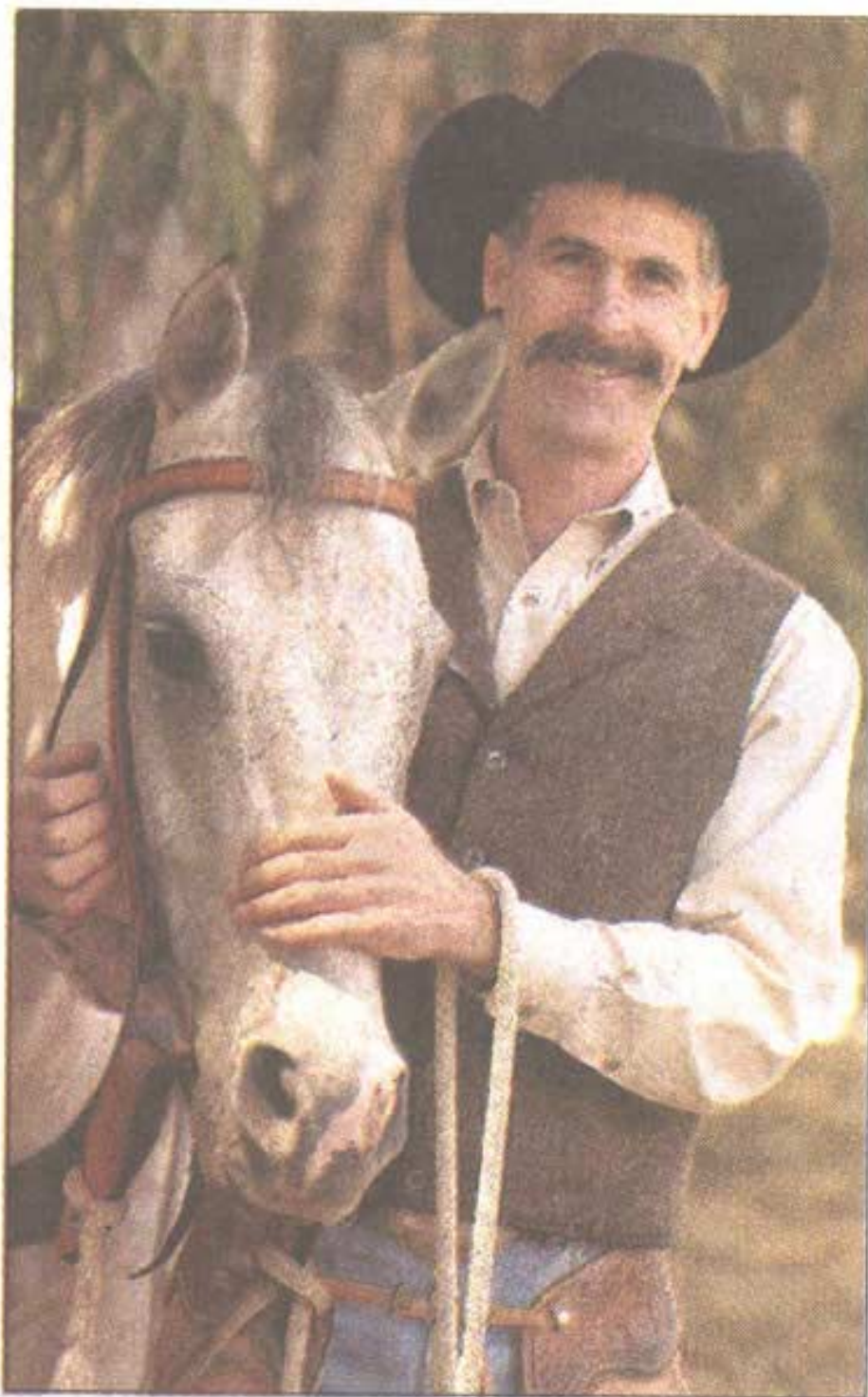
"Our past rides on the horse's back," said Reis, guided by a brand of Old West spirituality in his quest to commemorate the horse.

"The time is right because we have a Texas rancher in the White House. President Bush could create the national 'Day of the Horse' with the stroke of his pen," Reis said.

The 44-year-old horseman is more comfortable cleaning stables than attending congressional hearings or legislative sessions. But Reis is willing to move in unfamiliar territory.

"I owe everything I am to horses,"

TURN TO **HORSE**, PAGE B3



JEFF KAN LEE / The Press Democrat

Penngrove horse trainer Dennis Reis, shown with his horse, Beau, got the California Legislature to create the "Day of the Horse".

HORSE: President's liaison contacted about holiday

CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1

said Reis, best known as Sonoma County's own "horse whisperer." Instead of constraints such as bits and neck ropes, he uses communication and understanding to gentle horses and teach permanent behavior. He calls it universal horsemanship.

The quintessential image of a cowboy, Reis is tall, lanky, mustachioed and slow-talking. He wears Wranglers, a black cowboy hat and the silver belt buckle he won in the 1983 Sonoma Valley Rodeo.

Home at his nine-acre horse ranch in Penngrove, Reis teaches his "gentling" methods to horse owners who come from all over the country and pay up to \$200 a day to soak up his horse sense.

But Reis didn't land in Sonoma County from Wyoming or Montana. He was born in Marin County and got his first horse at 10. When he was 12, his family moved to a small spread in Penngrove and Reis became enthralled with the cowboy way. He's been riding, training and loving horses ever since.

Reis' push for a national horse celebration is accelerating following his recent success in California.

It took Reis and his fiancée Deborah Fish, manager of the Reis Ranch, more than a year to get California lawmakers to approve a resolution making the second Saturday in December the Day of the Horse.

"The second Saturday in December should be specially set aside as the Day of the Horse to encourage all citizens to be mindful of the welfare of the horse and its contributions to our economy, heritage and history," reads the resolution introduced by Assemblyman Joe Nation, D-San Rafael.

Now with California in the stable, Reis and Fish are working to give horses in the other 49 states the same recognition each December.

The couple has been in contact with the White House, communicating with Lamar

Stanley, President Bush's public liaison. Stanley says it's now a matter of presenting the proposal to Bush when he has a few minutes between more pressing presidential duties, such as the faltering economy and the war on terrorism.

"At this point we are just waiting for it to get to the president's desk. Once he sees it I'm confident he will agree that a day honoring horses in America is something that is worthwhile and long overdue," Reis said.

Fish said signing a resolution honoring horses may be the only thing Bush does that isn't criticized by someone somewhere.

Reis said there are nearly 7 million horses in the United States today. He began by showing horses in 4-H and started competing in junior rodeos when he was a teen-ager. He said he wasn't much of a student when he attended Rancho Cotate High School in Rohnert Park.

"I probably would have dropped out of high school if it wasn't for horses. I had to stay in high school to compete in the high school rodeo competition," Reis said.

He then went on the professional rodeo circuit, riding bucking broncos and wrestling steers. But the rough and tumble of rodeos took a damaging toll on his body. His doctor told him to walk away from it while he still could.

About that time Reis said he had personal transformation, something he calls a "machectomy," shedding his tough-guy approach to life and horse training.

"It's not the horse that needs to be trained, it's the people," Reis said. "I train people to communicate with their horse in a gentle, non-restrictive way. It's a way of relating to the horse in its own language. Body language is the only language a horse can understand."

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