

Jo Jo Geronimo / Jupiter

Landslide – Lucretia Lobell, by Nero
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*T*urns out, horses are very good at breaking up bar fights.

That's what Glenn Barrett and the rest of the Saratoga Springs (New York) Police Department found out one summer night, early in his ten-year stint as a mounted police officer.

"The fight call came in; they had fifteen people in the roadway," said Barrett. "I went galloping down the street and we gave verbal commands for people to get out of the roadway. They didn't listen; they were continuing to fight, so we put the horse through the crowd.

"We wound up breaking the crowd up to where the officers on the ground could handle a lot of it. I grabbed one or two people and handed them over to officers on the ground. I grabbed their collar and dragged them back, while giving them verbal commands at all times."

The horse that went through the crowd that day was the bay Standardbred pacer, Jo Jo Geronimo, who got a new name, Jupiter, when he joined the police force in 2003.

Things changed for Jupiter and Barrett that night on Caroline Street in Saratoga, a city with a wintertime population of 26,000, but host to nearly a million visitors each summer.

Barrett and Jupiter were rookie officers together in 2003. Barrett wanted to be a police officer all his life, but he grew up in Bayonne, New Jersey, in the shadow of Manhattan, where no one dreams about catching bad guys from atop a horse.

Barrett's eventual partner didn't grow up wanting to fight crime. He was meant to be a racehorse. As Jo Jo Geronimo, he won three races, showed signs of promise, but something was amiss.

"He had some tendon issues," said Joanne Hamilton, his former owner. "We tried and tried and tried. He got time off, he had vet work done. We could always get the leg to tighten up, but as soon as we started training him down for speed, the leg would blow up again and we had to stop." Hamilton was ready when Jo Jo had to stop forever.

"My priority is always, with any horse, if they're not healthy enough to race, I want to find good homes."

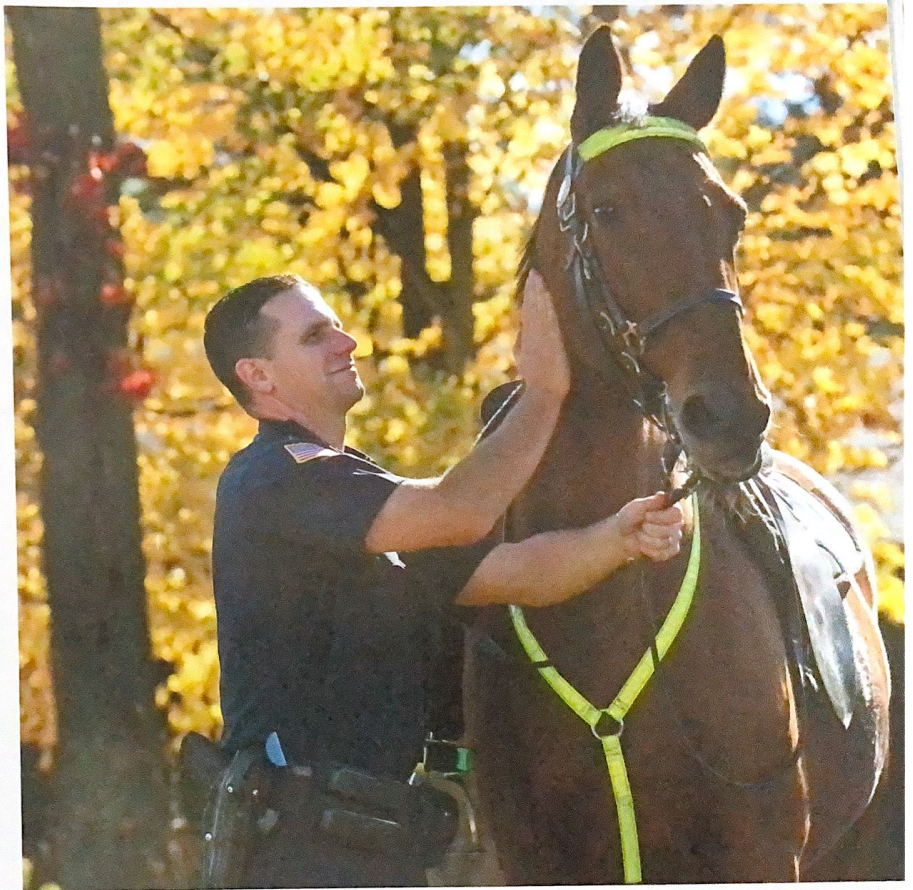
Jo Jo left the track, lounged in the field and developed a taste for carrots. Through family connections, Hamilton learned the Saratoga Springs Police Department was looking for an equine officer.

Jo Jo Geronimo got a try out and was declared fit for duty. He got a new name, a new job and a new way of life, for which he was well suited. "Personality wise, you couldn't ask for a better horse," said Hamilton. "You could do anything you needed to him. In a sense, he really was like a big dog. You could talk to him; it was almost like he understood you."

Jupiter and Barrett were on even footing when they started working together in 2003. "Neither one of us had any experience," said Barrett. "Him being a harness track horse, he'd never had anyone on his back. I went to the 4H club here locally for training and my boss at the time, Mike Chowske, had more riding experience, so he broke Jupiter."

"They put me through a two-month program with the park police. I had some trail riding experience as a kid; I went into it thinking I'd have the least experience, but out of the three other guys, I had the most on a horse."

Barrett didn't quite conjure up the Lone Ranger, galloping off in a cloud of dust to keep the peace. The inevitable byproduct of being around a horse was an obstacle for Barrett.



Jupiter with his law enforcement partner, Officer Glenn Barrett

"Going through the training," he said, "I was thinking I made a bad decision because I wasn't the type of guy who wanted to get dirty around horses. I had to pick up manure and I said, 'Ugh, this is not me.' My instructor said, 'Look, there's nothing to this.' I progressed and finally thought, 'Man, this is the best decision I ever made.' At this stage, I enjoy the horsehair, the smell.

"Once the training ended, they handed me the reins and said, 'Here, Jupiter and you are partners.' They put me on Broadway with no gates, no building, no nothing; I could do whatever I wanted."

Jupiter's role with the mounted unit (he makes up 50 percent of the force along with his fellow equine officer, the draft horse King Tut) has evolved from one of mostly show to mostly go.

"When I started, it was more PR and for visibility at the racetrack," said Barrett. "We were there for visibility and monitoring traffic, keeping an eye on things."

Jupiter goes to work late most days. His shift starts at 11 p.m., when Barrett or fellow equine officer, Pat O'Leary, arrives to tack him up and head to Caroline Street, site of many of Saratoga's drinking establishments.

"It's usually late at night, midnight to five or six in the morning," said Barrett. "We're out for PR functions during the day, but the primary bread and butter is bar patrol."

Jupiter provides an advantage a patrol car cannot, said Barrett. On horseback, he can maneuver between parked cars and up on the sidewalk if necessary. "Having a horse out there is like having an extra five guys. Most of the time I can see a problem before it's going to happen.

"If I even move down to the area where there's a problem and just watch them, most people aren't going to do anything at that point, they will walk away. So it prevents problems before they even happen."



Sergeant Aaron Benware, who supervises the mounted program, realizes Jupiter's contribution to safety and efficiency. "Jupiter and Glenn Barrett, together, do the work of about six or seven officers," he said. "With Jupiter, he can control people, move crowds, break up fights. If officers are attempting to take someone into custody, we use the horse as a barricade between the officers and unruly subjects who are trying to interfere. It's a huge asset to us from an officer safety standpoint."

A big target in a crowd of alcohol-affected people sometimes attract problems, though. Jupiter is protected, as are all police animals in New York, from assault, by both their skill and that of their handler, as well as a regulation making such contact a crime.

Twice he's been the target of assaults: in the summer of 2010, when he was punched in the face in the wee hours of the morning and then slapped repeatedly on the flank and again in early morning, in 2012. Neither horse assailant got away with it; Jupiter was barely bothered.

"No response," is how Barrett characterized Jupiter's reaction to being assaulted. "I have such faith in him. He's a rock. He makes me look good."

Jupiter, now with ten years' experience under his belt, has taken the initiative to provide additional security at times, such as when Barrett detained a half-dozen suspects, using his voice and his horse.

"I had them lined up against a wall and told them, 'Don't move. If you don't move, everything will be fine and the horse won't bother you.'"

As if to emphasize his partner's words, Jupiter reached out to nibble the ear of one of the suspects. "The kid said, 'Officer, I don't want to move, but he's nibbling my ear!'"

When officers in patrol cars arrived to conduct interviews, said Barrett, one of them called the ear-nibble recipient to be interviewed. "The kid's like, 'I'm not moving until the officer on the horse says I can move.'"

While an effective tool of intimidation, Jupiter has also been a source of comfort, notably for former owner Joanne Hamilton.

"My husband, John, passed away very unexpectedly, in 2012," said Hamilton. "My family contacted the police department and asked if Jo Jo could attend the services, and he did. It was just so touching that they would want to give back to me with my horse."

"When we were going to the church for the services, he was on the side of the road, Jo Jo and Officer Barrett in full uniform. When we were going into the church, he actually whinnied. It was like he knew."

"That gesture truly makes me realize how wonderful our police force is and that Jo Jo has a very good home and a good job. It's a win-win for everybody."

After a tough summer of keeping the peace, Jupiter retreats to his home at Joann and Dennis Walpole's farm in Saratoga Springs, and Barrett, to a patrol car.

Throughout the winter, Barrett stops at the barn to visit his partner with wife Heather and daughters Juliana, four, and Grace, two. He's raising them with a connection to animals that the kid from Bayonne never had.

"I have an emotional connection with him and I didn't have much connection with animals at all growing up," said Barrett. "The girls love going to see the horses; to share that with my family is priceless."

Now nineteen, Jupiter gets diligent veterinary care and will have a secure retirement from the department when needed, but he still reports for duty as assigned.

"He is slowing down, but I go by the vet's recommendations and I think he has a few more good years," said Barrett. "Where we go and what we do is limited. We're not going to be running ten blocks. For the type of work we are doing right now, I don't think he will retire any time soon." 