

# SOUTH COAST TODAY

## BRIAN LOWNEY: TIVERTON SANCTUARY GIVES ANIMALS ANOTHER CHANCE AT LIFE

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FEATHERED FRIENDS: Wendy Taylor Humphrey, founder of West Place Animal Sanctuary in Tiverton, R.I., checks on the swans that call the enclosure home.

Grant is probably the luckiest swan on the planet.

The large, long-necked water bird has found an adoring home at the West Place Animal Sanctuary in Tiverton, R.I., a place where abandoned or injured water fowl, farm animals, horses and other creatures get another chance at life on a large pristine farm where they are loved and provided with compassionate care.

Sanctuary founder Wendy Taylor Humphrey started the non-profit enterprise more than four years ago while emotionally recovering from a devastating house fire in 2003 that killed nine family pets.

"I needed to do something to try to remedy that situation so I started doing this," Humphrey says.

The loss of the treasured creatures still is an uncomfortable subject for the Providence-based attorney to discuss, she adds tearfully.

Humphrey began her dedicated rescue mission by rehabilitating young songbirds, but soon discovered that her busy schedule didn't offer much time for the demanding task.

"When they are babies, they need to eat every 20 minutes," she says, sharing that when she was in court, her office secretary or paralegal would feed the birds.

Humphrey, who underwent extensive training by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management and was required to pass a comprehensive test before being licensed to operate the sanctuary, now rehabilitates ducks, wild turkeys, swans and other birds, as well as goats, cows and horses. The guest list has included a loon and other species of exotic waterfowl.

The often injured, recovering or abandoned animals are relinquished by a variety of sources including Wildlife Rehabilitators of Rhode Island, the Department of Environmental Management, Audubon Society, the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, as well as animal control officers and law enforcement agencies.

"Word gets around," the animal rehabilitator says. Humphrey emphasizes that the sanctuary is not a refuge for ducklings bought as Easter gifts and abandoned once the novelty wears off.

While Grant is one of the lucky ones (he was in good health and just needed a caring home), Peepers, a wild turkey who now enjoys her role as one of the sanctuary's goodwill ambassadors, once faced an uncertain future.

The playful turkey was discovered on a Bristol, R.I. golf course a year-and-a-half ago, abandoned by its mother and siblings. The two-day old chick suffered toe deformities, two broken legs and a broken wing.

Dr. Meredith Bird, an avian specialist at Veterinary Services of Wickford in Saunderstown, R.I., didn't initially think Peepers would survive, but after delicate and successful surgery, the charming wild turkey has overcome several physical challenges to become one of the sanctuary's official greeters.

Earlier this year, Humphrey answered a plea from Dr. Bird asking the sanctuary to care for 18 baby mallard ducks.

"I just got them in one big box," Humphrey says, adding that the healthy chicks were abandoned by different mothers that were killed by cars, foxes or other predators.

Once they matured, the colorful mallards flew off to find new homes.

Humphrey reveals that Grant and other swans help protect the smaller water birds from roaming predators such as foxes and fisher cats. The swans also prevent ospreys, snowy egrets and hawks from stopping off to grab a quick lunch of Japanese koi fish that swim in the sanctuary's large inground pool.

The sanctuary is also home to a menagerie of several other rescued animals, including three goats, four sheep and several cats and dogs.

Humphrey says her mission comes with a high price. It costs about \$20,000 to feed and provide veterinary care for the animals, in addition to maintaining meticulously kept barns where the animals are housed and kept warm.

While the sanctuary does receive small grants and donations, Humphrey provides most of the funding to operate the bustling facility. With no staff and occasional volunteer support, she and her husband Tom, an engineer, do most of the work.

"The reward is unexplainable," Humphrey says. "I really do think that the animals are grateful. I think that they know."

For more information about West Place Animal Sanctuary, e-mail [wendytaylorhumphrey@yahoo.com](mailto:wendytaylorhumphrey@yahoo.com).