



A Dream Come True

By Nancy Dewar
Photography by Shawn McGaff

30 miles east of Seattle in the lovely town of Sammamish there is a wonderful rescue farm. The Sammamish Animal Sanctuary is a non-profit where formerly abused or homeless animals are cared for and loved by many as they live out the rest of their lives. The farm began simply because Diane Gockel loves animals and has been rescuing creatures of all kinds ever since she was a little girl. What started as a family farm has evolved into a community treasure...one that is now touching the lives of people all over the world!

Diane and her husband Don purchased the farm 17 years ago and were delighted to get out of congested and busy Bellevue, where they had lived for many years. The first rescue animals to arrive were goats. Diane was volunteering for a local goat rescue organization and would bring the babies home to foster, bottle feed and then return them to the rescue group. She laughed and said, "Sometimes I fell in love with them. Like every time. And then I'd keep them!"

Cows, horses, mini-donkeys, alpacas, pigs, bunnies and other creatures in need followed; and the Sammamish Animal Sanctuary is now home to over 40 loved animals! In the early days, people walking by would stop and look at the animals in the pasture. That gave Diane the idea to put up a sign with pictures of the animals and their names so folks would know who they

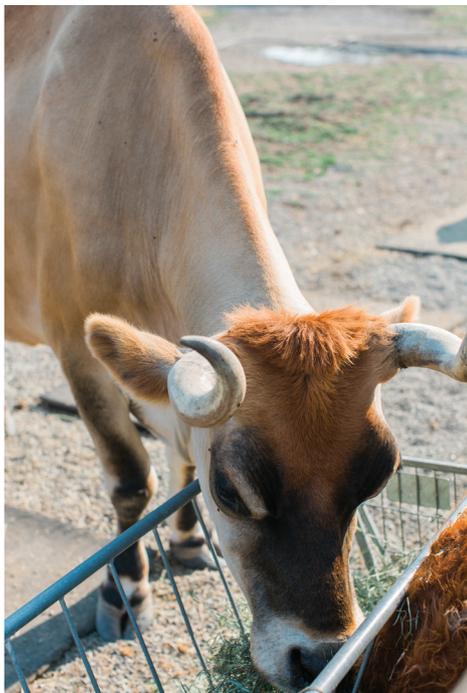
were looking at! "It was fun. I could hear kids coming up the road saying...there's Cowboy." She then put up a second sign; "Come In & Look at the Animals."

People accepted the invitation and came on in! Diane explained that this was great not only for the people, but also for the animals. "The animals arrived very scared, and we worked hard to build their trust. People visiting was good for them. Mothers would come by with their children. Cocktail parties would come by, and we'd invite them to have a glass of wine with us!" Not only had the Gockel's welcomed amazing creatures in need into their lives, but they were now also welcoming total strangers into their lives!

Originally, the Gockel's put up a few small barns on the property. As more animals arrived, they needed a bigger barn and

contacted Barn Pros, an innovative company that provides beautifully designed high-value buildings that combine the efficiency of a packaged kit with the craftsmanship of a custom design. Jeff Knoth, founder of Barn Pros, had built their original barns years ago. The new barn has 4 large stalls, a walkway through the middle for visitors and a special area (complete with a picnic table and more) for people to gather.

As more people visited the farm, many started asking how they could help support it. Diane explained, "That is how and why we started the 501c3 non-profit a few years ago." Since then, she has put up more signs... where to park, visitor guidelines, etc. I asked Diane if anyone can come on it. "Yep, people just wander in and out. We don't know most of them. But it's so much more fun to share this. I wouldn't get near the joy I get if I kept the gates closed!"



The farm is hands-on and kids mingle with the animals in the pastures. Children and the miniature horses love the birthday party events. The kids brush them, braid their manes and adorn the little horses with ribbons and bows, as well as take them for walks. It's a love-fest on all fronts! Regarding its hands-on aspect, one mother told Diane, "After visiting the farm, my kids just don't get why they can't go into the animal cages at the zoo!"

A few years ago, Diane began writing children's books about some of the animals on the farm. They are written from the animal's point of view and tell their own personal rescue story. Diane said, "The purpose of the books is to give the animals an authentic voice about their own story." The stories are now being shared world-wide via "Skype in the Classroom / Microsoft in Education." This platform enables educators to have their kids participate in virtual field trips. Diane has read her wonderful books to children in China, Mexico, Europe, Eastern Europe, India, South America and more. She ends the reading with a "video introduction" of the animals. She also reads at area schools, and children often come to the farm to read to the animals (telling them 'their' story!).

"Our farm started off all about the animals. Now it's also about the people who visit the farm. Just like the animals, they have a story too. We see joy on their faces. There's no competition here...just a wonderful experience we can share together." Diane told me about a recent touching story. She ran into a woman on the farm who had just lost her mother. The woman said to her, "I just needed to be here in my happy place."

I asked Diane about some of the special rescue stories. "They all are special, as are the beloved animals. We take in other peoples' unwanted animals. At one point, they were something no one wanted. This is their forever home. They will live out the rest of their lives here. All of the animals are part of our family."

Last summer 2 horses arrived from a kill pen. They were really beat up with gashes on their bodies. One was extremely depressed and acted like it had lost all hope. The other was an ornery,





dominant, very sick mare. The depressed one has now found her spirit, and Diane recently rode the dominant mare bareback with a bitless bridle. "That's how far she's come with love and trust. Once she knew she had love, affection and a purpose, she changed completely."

Diane also told me about a mom and baby donkey they saved. The mom arrived lethargic and scared. Neither Diane nor her volunteers could get near either one of them. Eight months later she's now joyfully running circles in the pasture with her little one. And they now follow everyone around the farm!

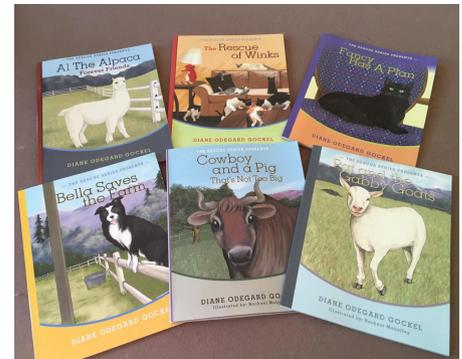
And we can't leave out Cowboy, a 2,000-pound Jersey steer. Last January Diane rescued a 10-day-old calf whose mom had collapsed and couldn't nurse. "Knowing the mom was going to die, I offered to take the calf. The man wouldn't surrender it, so I ended up paying \$1,000 for the calf and bottle fed the little guy 2 times a day for 2 months. We named him Toby. Cowboy would just stare at Toby over the fence. Now they're in the same pasture, side by side, all the time. Cowboy provides shade for Toby and constantly grooms his buddy. When Cowboy lies down, Toby reciprocates...licking & nibbling his big, best friend."

Diane shared many more wonderful, heart-felt stories. Our conversation was so inspiring. I loved her ending comment, "I'm very grateful we can provide this place for our community. I'm humbled and people appreciate it so. It really brings the community together, and I'm so grateful for the committed volunteers that help on the farm and share our love of animals." Diane said her motto in life is "Be your purpose. This certainly isn't something everyone would do, but it truly is my purpose."

And dreams do come true! When the new "big barn" was put up, Diane's Mother gave her a picture that she had drawn as a child. It's now hanging proudly in their love-filled barn. "I drew a picture when I was 12 of a barn I wanted to have some day. When our new barn was done, my Mother pulled out my old drawing. It was spooky how it looks so similar to what we now have... paddocks and all."

www.scrsammamish.com

Note: Diane's children's books are available on Amazon. Search under author's name (Diane Gockel).



A big thanks to Barn Pros for suggesting this story! For 25 years, they've been providing pre-engineered building packages to clients across the US & Canada that offer the look & feel of a custom design without the custom price...delivered in weeks. Each package includes fully engineered, state-stamped blue prints; eliminating the need to hire an architect & engineer with a direct cost savings for clients. Buildings may be personalized with a wide selection of option packages & accessories. (www.BarnPros.com)