

Robertson House raises funds for abused animals

BY KIMBERLY LOCHHEAD
klochhead@thenewsemc.ca

EMC News — Unlike its usual quiet days, the front lawn of Robertson House Retirement Residence was bustling with loud quacks, barks, and other noises from wooden pens holding goats, a rabbit, goose, puppy, lama, and sheep on Aug. 11.

The animals of Big Sky Ranch from Kemptville invaded the area as part of a fundraiser hosted by Robertson House in Bells Corners to raise donations towards the care, food, and vet expenses of the ranch with a barbecue, raffle, 50/50 draw, and carnival games.

"I want the community to gain awareness that the ranch isn't funded by the government and the animals need assistance," said Amy Naphan, activity director of Robertson House. "There are people out there with big hearts helping animals like Andy, who runs the ranch. I live in Kemptville and I know they need a lot of help and thought it would be fun for the residents to see the animals."

The event was planned three months ago by Ms. Naphan, who said she intended to give community members an opportunity to enjoy themselves while donating to a good cause.

She also wanted residents to interact with the animals and invite their families to participate in the fun.

Vernie Foy, a resident of Robertson House, recruited her daughter-in-law to help sell raffle and 50/50 draw tickets.

"The animals need our help because they have been abused," she said. "I also help out because I just have volunteered all my life. The children love the animals and this fundraiser means they will be helped."

She added that it is important Robertson House engage the community with the event because they are part of the community and residents often walk throughout the neighbourhood.

Andy Parent, owner of the Big Sky Ranch, said he enjoys trekking the animals from the country to the city for many events.

"A lot of people in senior citizen homes haven't seen these type of animals in 15 or 20 years and probably had a farm in the past at some point," he said. "It brings a lot of good memories back for them and happiness. They're all smiling and laughing."

At this time of year, the fundraiser is especially needed in order for the ranch to prepare for the

winter months ahead, added Mr. Parent.

"One horse alone can eat over \$1,000 in hay per year," he explained.

"The ranch costs about \$50,000 per year to run. We have some great vets from Smiths Falls and Merrickville who try to give us a break but they still need to be paid for their work."

Food bills for the ranch can run from \$900 a month and up. Currently, they have 17 horses among the many other animals, including emus, ostriches, buffalos, and pigs.

"A lot of people think cruelty to animals involves just dogs and cats, but it goes way beyond that," said Mr. Parent.

"When I first started the ranch, I found out about the abusing going on and wanted to help. The closest places to help care for animals were 45 minutes away in either direction and these larger animals don't fall into their protocol anyway."

After leaving his well-paying job in the city, Mr. Parent established the ranch in Oct. 2002 after falling in love with the property.

"As time went on, people found out about me and [now] just bring me animals they find all the time," he said.

"They say in life some



Community members and residents of Robertson House enjoyed a petting zoo as part of a fundraiser for Big Sky Ranch, held Aug. 11.

people are picked for things and I guess I was lucky to be one of them to have a direction with animals."

On Sept. 26, Big Sky Ranch will be at the Greenboro Veterinary Clinic fundraiser at Conroy Pit, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the corner of Conroy Rd. and Hunt Club Rd.

For more information, visit www.bigskyranch.ca.

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