



Photo by Annie Duncan

Charlie the llama gives Donna Smith, co-owner of Land O'Lakes Rescue Petting farm, a kiss as she feeds him a carrot from between her teeth.

## Rescue farm dedicated to animals

By Annie Duncan

Donna Smith walks through the front gate of Land O'Lakes rescue farm with a bucket of carrots tucked behind her back. Dozens of excited hooves run across the yard gathering around Smith.

She greets the curious farm animals with a laugh, giving them each a loving stroke. "Show me your smile" Smith says to a miniature pony handing him a carrot.

Smith and her husband Barry will be opening their petting farm dedicated to rehabilitating animals that have been abused and neglected for their 14th consecutive summer this May long weekend. Admission to the farm is \$10 per person and free under the age of two.

"Our mission, is to bring in abused and

neglected animals, doesn't matter if it's a dog, a cat or a farm animal and rehabilitate that animal, bringing them back to health" explains Smith.

The couple started their farm with some convincing from their five foster children, after a horse farm the family was volunteering at shut down. Originally, they used the farm as a therapeutic method to help heal their kids of their past trauma while also helping the animals heal. They had no plans to open to the public at the time.

Two years after starting the farm, their foster children noticed how much the animals had helped them and wanted to help others with their trauma through caring for animals. "Animals are very therapeutic," Smith says.

The animals come from a variety of dif-

ferent situations, but usually the Smiths are contacted about an animal in need and work alongside the SPCA to provide the animal a better life. "When they come here, the plan is this becomes their forever home," says Smith. "We never close our doors to any animal that's in need. We find the room somehow. We build onto our barn if we have to."

Preparing to open for this season has been a challenging one to say the least because of a decline in Barry's health, as well as dealing with the pandemic.

About five years ago Barry, sustained life-threatening injuries after a logging truck hit its ABS brakes while passing the farm, causing all the animals to rear up. At the time Barry was putting away a bull that pinned him up against a wall out of fear. "He nearly didn't survive, but he did"

says Smith.

The accident caused continuous health problems for Barry, leading him to be diagnosed with polymyositis and being in and out of the hospital every year since. Polymyositis is an auto immune disease that causes inflammation and weakness in muscles, according to an article published by the Cleveland Clinic. Currently, Barry is back in the hospital.

The farm is not-for-profit and before the pandemic relied on funds from auctions of donated items, charity dinners and admission fees. The Smiths also collect beer cans and bottles, wine bottles and pop cans to exchange for money and will accept any donations made by the public.

All of the proceeds get put directly back into the animals and are used for feed, vet

ills and maintenance. All employees that help keep the farm running volunteer their time. "We do it for the love of the animals" says Smith.

The Smiths are fearful that especially during this time that the funds just aren't there. They have been taking steps to gain charity status through the Canadian Revenue Agency but have put it on hold because of restrictions caused by COVID-19.

They recently have made the decision to sell their home to run the farm full-time.

"Our hopes are to continue on. Even if Barry doesn't survive all of this, our plans are to continue on our mission. It is important to us, and important to my husband for me to continue to do this," says Smith.



Photo by Cassie Williamson

Isabel Williamson, four, of Stirling gets ready for her outside time during her homeschooling while quarantined from the COVID-19 pandemic.

## A look back at COVID

By Bec Gauvin

The last year of news has been predominantly featuring one headline, and before I've said it you already know what it is: COVID-19. For a journalist-to-be like many of our staffers, this year has brought some poignant and drastic changes that have more than prepped us to cover...well just about anything at this point! In honour of the last Pioneer for many of us, we'd like to take a look back at the last year of pandemic photojournalism.

### Lockdown

On March 17, 2020, just over a year ago to date, Ontario Premier Doug Ford declared a state of emergency that shut down many businesses and schools alike. The day before on March 16, all students living on Loyalist College residence were sent emails asking them to withdraw and move out immediately, effectively emptying the campus by the week's end. This change forced a move for many young Ontarians as we shifted our lives and shuttered in with our families or friends. For our journalists, the beginning of the first wave meant a different community with a different set of stories, and almost no access as people were nervous and rarely available for photography. Now, a full year later, as we've experienced two waves of the pandemic and are warned of a third, we've become accustomed to these challenges, and as people are finding a way to continue their lives, we too have prevailed photographically to bring stories throughout the semester.

### Virtual Learning

With the first wave came a sharp turn towards virtual learning. What had started as an extended March break for elementary and secondary students became a semester sequestered away from their peers.

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