

Sanctuary to become nonprofit

By Jodi Schneider McNamee
Correspondent

Harmony Farms Sanctuary, located in Sisters, is much more than a shelter for rescued farm animals.

Robine Bots, a licensed marriage and family therapist, uses her farm animals — from horses to pot-belly pigs — in her practice, and finds them to be very beneficial for many of her clients. The animals help clients define boundaries, and are a safe and comforting presence.

Walt Disney once said, “If you can dream it, you can do it.” And two years ago Bots and her family did do it by building Harmony Farms, including all the fencing for the barns.

“My dream was coming true,” Bots said. “My dad built the barn and I talked him into making space for horses. It was for my therapy business.”

Although her family moved around a lot, Bots is a lifelong horse and animal lover and grew up riding, training, and showing horses.

Bots earned a degree in psychology from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo in 1997, and then went on to earn a master’s degree in clinical psychology. She has been a marriage and family therapist since 2004 and works with kids, teens, adults, couples and families.

Her first position in Central Oregon was at the Deschutes County Mental Health Department.

“It was an agency job and I worked around the region as a mental-health therapist,” Bots said.

After putting enough experience under her belt, she ventured out on her own two years ago.

“I now work in three locations; I have an office in my barn in Sisters, because I love helping people through real-life experiences using

animals,” explained Bots. “I also have an office in Bend and I work as a mental-health therapist at Healing Reins one day a week.”

Healing Reins is a nationally recognized, accredited therapeutic riding center in Bend serving children and adults with physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioral disabilities.

Bots invites at-risk youth and people with developmental disabilities to come to the farm and hang out with the animals that have been rescued. The visits help the animals heal from their trauma and vice-versa.

“I also have had students from the YouthBuild program in Sisters come out and help with the building of our goat house.”

The students at YouthBuild are young men and women ages 16-24 that have struggled with traditional school or dropped out and are returning to get their diploma or GED and learn skills in their career and life.

The goal for Harmony Farms is to become a nonprofit and share the farm with other people, not on a big scale, but on a small farm scale.

“I want to let people know that animals are sentient beings and have feelings like we do,” said Bots.

“I love all the animals we have, the goats, ducks, chickens, horses and mini donkeys, but it’s the pigs that I really enjoy, because they are so smart. There are literally hundreds of pot-belly pigs in



PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER MCNAMEE

Life at Harmony Farms is, well, harmonious.



PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER MCNAMEE

Pigs are favorites for Lex and Marieke Jeffries.

rescue all across the county because somebody told them that the pig they purchased will remain really small, but that’s not true.”

One of Bots four pot-belly pigs, Zoey, who made her debut at the Doggie Dash & Stroll this summer, is a rescue.

“We also have four horses, a mini pony, two miniature donkeys and three goats. One of the horses, Lovebug, was also a rescue,” Bots says. “She was rescued by Mustangs to the Rescue at the Eugene auction where she could have been slaughtered. After she came out of quarantine we got her.

“We have volunteers to help on the farm, but could use more. We even have a volunteer that does Reiki with the animals, Sam Swerdlo. I’ve already seen changes in some of the animals.”

Bots’ two children understand the work that goes into having a farm and are

an integral part of Harmony Farms Sanctuary.

“My mom gives all of the horses and goats hay, but my brother Lex and I feed the chickens and the pigs, and water the trees that are growing here. I brush the horses and we also re-fill the horses’ drinking water and the animal pools that the pigs like to go in,” explained 11-year-old Marieke Jeffries. “My favorite job is taking care of the horses, brushing them, picking their hooves, and petting them is the best. We also put halters on the donkeys and take them for walks. My mom and I get to ride some of the horses, too.”

As for nine-year-old Lex Jeffries, his favorite job on the farm has nothing to do with horses.

“I really like seeing the pigs in the morning and petting them,” said Lex. “I just love to spend time with the pigs. It’s fun taking them for walks.”

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