

Evelyn: ‘Each of the chickens has its own personality’

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Here it goes: Chickens with fur-like feathers, those are silkies. When silkies have “hard feathers” — like a normal chicken — they’re called satins. When a silkie has no feathers on its neck, that’s a showgirl. If the hen’s feathers flip out, making her look like a cross between a late-blooming peony and a very fancy feather duster, that hen is “frizzled.” Fun fact: Frizzled hens are very poor fliers.

And Evelyn? She’s the jackpot. She’s a frizzled satin showgirl.

Silkies are known for their docile personalities. They are excellent mother hens and chicken farmers will sometimes use them to hatch out chicks, Rueff said. They are not known for their high egg production. Still, Rueff and Ewing often have more eggs than they know what to do with.

For most people, though, silkies are pets.

They take some extra care. It would be foolish to let silk-



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Chickens interact in an enclosure in Brent Rueff’s backyard.

ies roam freely on a farm. The poof of feathers that gives them such a silly, soft and endearing look obscures their vision and makes them easy targets for

predators. When it rains, the water droplets don’t slide off their feathers. Instead, silkies get soaked to their black skins. Yes, they have black skin. And

an extra toe.

They are a type of chicken better suited for what breeder Wendy Bruder terms “chicken fanciers,” people who are

less interested in production egg-layers and instead are looking for pets or therapy animals.

Or, Bruder said, “they’re for someone who wants a backyard living lawn ornament type of thing.” She has one friend who keeps her silkies inside. They wear diapers, sleep in her bedroom and even accompany her on trips to Home Depot.

Bruder, owner of the Portland-area Cluck N’ Chatter Ranch, is the breeder responsible for Evelyn. She estimates she spent five to six years perfecting the genetic cocktail that would become Miss Fancy Feathers.

“There’s a lot of boring genetics involved,” she apologized. “It takes a really long time to get that look with that feather type.”

Among other silkies and satins, Evelyn is not necessarily a rare combination, but she is a particularly nice-looking specimen, Bruder said. “I’m proud of her.”

Now this is important: It’s OK to laugh.

“They’re ridiculous!” Rueff said, looking fondly at the satins and silkies bobbing around his feet.

Each of the chickens has its own personality. Ewing and Rueff use words like “helpful,” “responsible,” “sweet,” “Miss Manners” and, with affection, “not the brightest” to describe individual hens. Rueff pointed out Lady, a partridge silkie and one of the first he and Ewing bought. She used to be queen of the coop until Evelyn came along and stole her crown.

Don’t worry, Lady seems to have adjusted.

“We’re literally always coming out here and laughing,” Ewing said.

Rueff and Ewing might leave parties early to get the hens inside at night. They might constantly worry about predators. Any noise in the backyard at night startles them awake. But in the end, the girls have been easier and more fun to care for than they ever expected.

Besides, Ewing noted, “It’s the pet that poops breakfast!”

Schools: Administrators have been trained to use ham radios

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would be good shelters,” said Tiffany Brown, the Clatsop County emergency manager, who helped author the report. “They are buildings that accommodate large numbers of people, but that’s where it stops. That’s where our planning has kind of stopped.”

For schools to be ready, more needs to be done to educate staff on what it takes to run a shelter, as well as the importance of planning for necessities like food, water, communication and medical supplies. Preparing a school to serve the mass care needs of a community takes planning well outside the scope of the typical responsibilities of educators, but because there is no state mandate requiring it, little to no coordination between

schools and other agencies has occurred, the report said.

That’s why the advisory commission recommended to the Legislature to have clearer guidelines for what should be expected of schools, including requiring preparedness messaging and encouraging supply storage near school grounds.

“I think there are two different stages: Preparing your own constituency and preparing as a community shelter,” Brown said. “Clatsop County is at the first.”

A community effort

The majority of schools in the county have some coordination with the American Red Cross to be used as shelters, said Jenny Carver, the local Red Cross disaster program manager.

For some, like Warrenton Grade School and Seaside High School, gearing up to be a community shelter didn’t seem practical given the likelihood the campuses would be inundated by a tsunami, but this fact isn’t disqualifying, Carver said.

“We look at inundation zones, but that’s not the only disaster we prepare for,” she said.

This strategy can also be complicated. As was seen in the Great Coastal Gale of 2007, regions like the Oregon Coast can become so isolated, agencies like the Red Cross can’t get access to run shelters.

“Having new schools be seismically sound and out of the inundation zone will change the conversation,” Brown said. “But we have

to build them, plan for them, with shelters in mind. Then we can use them that way after.”

Thinking about the school district’s community role in an emergency has been on the mind of Seaside School District Superintendent Sheila Roley ever since the \$99.7 million bond was passed by voters in 2016.

“We will have the physical site, but we can’t on our own provide the extended resources the community could possibly need,” Roley said.

In some avenues, the school district has started to plan ahead. Every administrator has been trained to use ham radios to help communicate if phone lines go down. The district is coordinating with the city to install a water reservoir

at the new campus that will be seismically safe and 400 feet above sea level. Plans have been discussed to establish cache sites filled with food.

But school districts don’t necessarily have large budget line items or staff for emergency preparedness training or supplies. “This really is an ongoing conversation,” Roley said. “It’s not within the district’s realm to provide for a major community response. This is going to have to be a community effort.”

A gathering spot

At Warrenton Grade School, Vice Principal Robbie Porter, who leads the charge on emergency preparedness for the school’s 800 students, said if the \$38.5 million bond

passes in November she would hope to see the new campus as a safe gathering spot.

But with only three grades initially moving out of the inundation zone, as an administrator, her concern and priority still lies in addressing the needs of the existing campus. Porter has worked on doing regular drills and developed procedures on the best way to evacuate students.

To be successful, other gaps, such as proper communication tools, food, water and shelter supplies and training, still need to be addressed.

“I want to network early ... get those connections so in case of the worst-case scenario we can be ready,” Porter said. “How can we work together to make that happen?”

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