

Rescue animals petition for more land

West Place Animal Sanctuary is teeming with new rescues, creating an urgent need for more space

BY MICHELLE MERCURE

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A nudge to the leg from Charles, a miniature donkey at West Place Animal Sanctuary, is his way of saying, "This is my home, not yours." Acknowledging it may prompt him to move on — depending on his current desire for attention. After all, this is his space.

As zoos across the nation evolve into conservation centers, the term "zoo" — once criticized by animal rights activists — has become less controversial. Zoos now play a role in preserving and protecting species and habitats, though the spectacle of seeing animals in enclosures often remains the main attraction. Patrick Cole, director of development and communications at West Place Animal Sanctuary in Tiverton, acknowledges this trend towards kindness in zoos, stating, "A lot of the better zoos are now focused on preservation and conservation, which is important."

He also points out the main difference between a zoo and a sanctuary is space. For the animals at the sanctuary, this is their space. They are not here to be seen, but heard. The experience is different — their stories are told, in part, by them, through vocalizations, nudges and demands for attention.

Charles, the miniature donkey, was rescued from a kill pen in Texas, along with his companion Timothy. Both spent a month in the hospital recovering from horrific living conditions. "They have become boisterous, confident, and goofy members of our farm family," Cole said, acknowledging Charles's growing confidence as he nudges visitors, letting them know he sees them in his home.

The sanctuary serves as a refuge where these animals can live their lives in peace, away from the abuse and neglect they endured before coming to the sanctuary. It is their "forever" home.

The need for more space

The sanctuary focuses specifically on criminal cases or situations where abuse and neglect are evident, even if they haven't yet reached law enforcement. Cole added, "Our goal is to rehabilitate these animals and restore their health. Once they're here, they stay here — it's their forever home." With the health of the animals comes longevity, and many are living beyond their projected life spans, so the need for more space is becoming a pressing concern.

According to Cole, the sanctuary is operating at or near capacity, always keeping space available for when authorities reach out. Many of the animals come from criminal abuse cases, with law enforcement and the Department of Environmental Management contacting the sanctuary when they encounter animals in need.

"We're the go-to for farm animals and wildlife that have suffered abuse and cruelty," said Cole.

In 2024, the sanctuary welcomed more than 60 new animals, from fish and turtles to goats, an emu, and a horse. As the need for more space grows, the sanctuary is interested in



PHOTOS BY RICHARD W. DIONNE JR.



ABOVE: Patrick Cole, director of development and communications at West Place Animal Sanctuary in Tiverton, is the main attraction for the rescued farm animals, as he delivers apples (pictured left to right): Felix the horse, Barnaby the lamb, Sadie the goat, and Daisy the goat. **LEFT:** Riley Durette, the animal care manager, becomes the main attraction for the farm animals as she brings them food.

acquiring the property next door to help accommodate more animals, as it is almost always at full capacity. With plans underway to renovate the barn to add more space for animals, Cole noted the limitations on the property, stating, "After the barn renovation project this spring, there isn't much more we can do with the barn and it wouldn't be feasible to construct new buildings on the current site. That would take away from the pastures and grazing areas and impact our rotational grazing program."

The neighboring property the sanctuary wishes to acquire was recently in the news due to the unforeseen demolition of the Lafayette

House. Cole expressed his shock at the event, stating "Like all our neighbors in Tiverton, we were shocked to see the historic home demolished in a matter of hours." The goal for acquiring the land is not only about more space for animals, though it eventually would be used for them. The use of the space would be about preservation. Cole commented, "We would honor and preserve the history of our agrarian community by creating a 'farm coast' destination in Tiverton for residents and visitors."

Cole noted that the current infrastructure on the neighboring land is not adequate to house the animals. He added, "There is enough avail-

able space next door that we could do many things that would entice visitors and support West Place's work, allowing us to serve more animals." Other recent and future updates to the sanctuary to improve the home of the animals include building a high-end chicken coop and an upgrade to the thousands of linear feet of fencing.

Visiting the sanctuary

The sanctuary is home to the animals as much as it is to the volunteers who come —

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PHOTOS BY RICHARD W. DIONNE JR.

LEFT: Volunteer George Kovacs is working on an extensive fencing project on the farm. **RIGHT:** This is the new chicken coop built for the chickens that call West Place Animal Sanctuary their home.

SANCTUARY: Volunteers' bond with the animals

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even on the harshest winter days — to show love and care for the animals' special needs. The reason these animals aren't adopted out is because of their ongoing medical needs, which require daily attention from people who know them well and can recognize signs of flare-ups. Feeling that nudge serves as a reminder that these experiences between animals and humans are a two-way street.

"It's as much a sanctuary for people as it is for animals," Cole said.

Volunteers form lasting bonds with the animals. "When you see the same animals week after week, you start to build relationships and learn their quirks and personalities," Cole said. "There's a sheep named Colby who loves a pair of pants I wear. Every time I put them on, he rubs his face on me, glued to my side."

The work at the sanctuary emphasizes that farm animals are just as intelligent, emotional,

and sentient as dogs and cats. Cole said, "While dogs and cats are widely adored, farm animals often go overlooked and underrepresented. They deserve the same care and compassion."

The sanctuary offers public visitors week-ends at certain times of the year, private group tours, couples tours, and a "chicken experience." It also hosts small weddings and engagement photo shoots. Later this year, they plan to offer more public tours on weekends to provide more options for the community to visit,

meet the animals, and learn about their work.

Beyond meeting the animals, visitors can also visit a graveyard dedicated to the nine pets lost in a house fire on the land before Wendy Taylor, the sanctuary's executive director, turned it into a refuge. The names of the deceased animals that inspired the sanctuary are as follows: a Doberman named Dobie, a Black Lab named Jake, cats Alec, Mulder, Tweak, Maizey, Bailey, and Stewart, and a special goat named Mo.

Meet some of the rescued farm animals



Pickles (8, Jan. 13)

The youngest and most dramatic of the four pigs at the sanctuary, Pickles was passed around between family members before being neglected. She was confined to a small pen, morbidly obese, and living in poor conditions. After being threatened with slaughter, West Place stepped in, gave her a new life with proper care, and helped her lose weight. Now, Pickles is healthy, happy, and loves exploring, exercising, and getting belly rubs.



Clover (5)

Clover the emu joined the sanctuary in August 2024 from a dangerous situation after her owners' land was seized. She lost her friends to predators and was left to fend for herself. Now, Clover enjoys fresh greens, new foods, and splashing in water. She's smart, remembers well, and loves her summer baths.



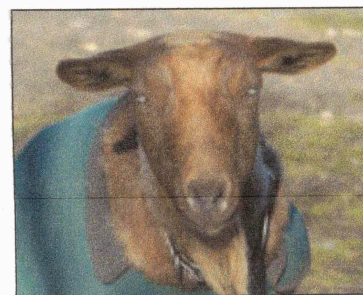
Charles (6, miniature) and Timothy (6)

Rescued from a kill pen in Texas, Charles and Timothy faced serious health issues but have thrived at West Place. They're the first donkeys at the sanctuary. They are playful, confident, and vocal. They love tug-of-war, tag, and attention.



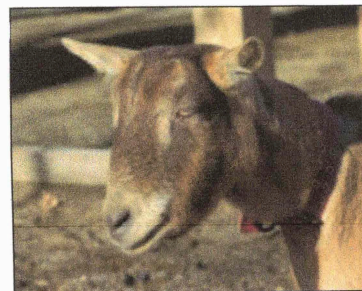
Diane (15)

Diane and her brother, Jack, were the first pigs rescued by West Place in 2019 from severe neglect. Diane, highly intelligent and a bit of a diva, has thrived and is known as the "queen of the sanctuary," often demanding belly rubs.



Daisy (7)

Daisy the goat arrived at West Place in 2024 after being relocated due to eminent domain, where she faced predators and harsh conditions. Daisy is playful, gaining confidence, and enjoys head scratches. She's also a bit of an escape artist.



Sadie (10)

A survivor of the 2016 Westport cruelty case, Sadie the goat was in poor health when rescued but has since become a friendly, social butterfly. She's the oldest of the goats at the sanctuary, loves mentoring new arrivals and sharing her wisdom. She also loves her companion, Colby the sheep.



Amber (5)

Rescued from a hoarding case in 2023, Amber was severely malnourished. Now, she's healthy and happily mingles with other animals, vocalizing all day, especially around mealtime.



Barnaby (6, left, mouth open) and Shaw (9, right)

Barnaby was rescued as a lamb in 2019 after being tied up and neglected. He grew up at West Place and, before turning 1, became a father to Zane and Zander. Shaw, also a survivor of the 2016 Westport cruelty case, gave birth unexpectedly to Barnaby's lambs in 2020. Shaw is a loving mother, and their sheep family is very close-knit.

Otto makes it out



PHOTOS COURTESY RICHARD PETRIN

Little Compton fire fighter Bryan Dupere brings Otto to shore after the Christmas rescue at Long Pond.

Dog fell through while on a walk Christmas afternoon

BY TED HAYES

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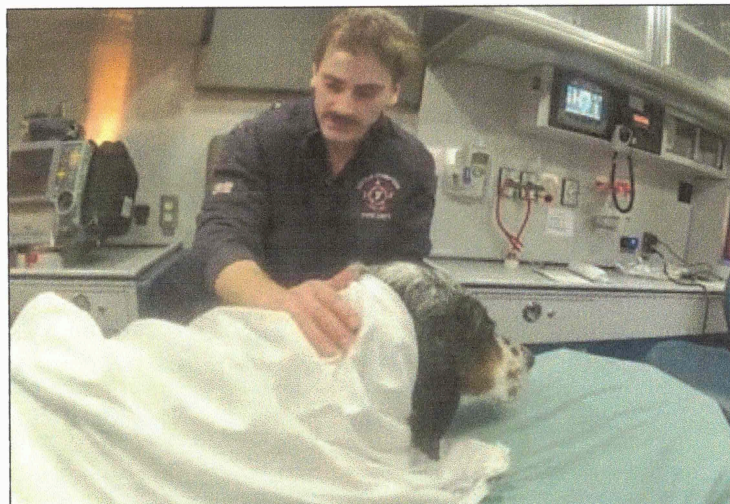
Otto the Dog is alive and well this New Year, after Little Compton fire fighters plucked it from Long Pond after it fell through the ice while chasing ducks on Christmas day.

Otto was taking a walk with his owner Nancy Clark at around 3 p.m. when he ventured too far out on the thin ice and went through. He was about 30 yards from shore, and bystanders were unable to reach him though they tried getting the dog out with an inflatable raft. While they were trying, they 911.

Fire fighters Jason DaSilva, Matt Hughes and Bryan Dupere were enjoying their Christmas afternoons when they got the call, and rushed down to the pond with survival suits and ice rescue gear.

While Hughes ventured out on an ice sled and Dupere got in the water in his suit, DaSilva coordinated the effort from shore.

"The dog was very, very tired," fire chief Richard Petrin said later. "They got him out,



Bryan Dupere tends to Otto in a rescue truck. The dog was tired and very cold after its 40-minute ordeal in the water.

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Tiverton building official resigns

John Hoyle left on Dec. 27, nine days after destruction of the Lafayette House

BY CHRISTIAN SILVIA
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Tiverton is looking for a new building, code enforcement and zoning officer, following the resignation late last month of former building official John Hoyle Jr.

Hoyle's Friday, Dec. 27 resignation came nine days after the historic Lafayette House at 3118 Main Road was torn down, and about three weeks after Hoyle went on leave in the wake of Tiverton Police Chief Patrick Jones' arrival as interim town administrator.



Former Tiverton Building Official John Hoyle Jr.

Tiverton Town Council members voted Monday evening to start the search for a replacement. But before the vote to do so, multiple residents came forward to criticize the town for allowing the historic building to be torn down in the first place.

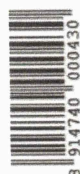
"We need historic zoning," Main Road resident Fred Stachura said.

In October, property owner David Rose was granted a town demolition permit to raze the historic structure, the earliest parts of which date back to 1735. Preservationists said after it was torn down that they were not alerted to the demolition until it was too late.

As the news of the home's demise spread around town, criticism of the building office's apparent failure to catch erroneous information on Rose's application mounted. When asked to state whether the home was on any historic registers, Rose answered 'No,' though it is listed on a local registry, and with the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission.

Then, about a week after the demolition, a worker in the town building office acknowledged that she "amended" the demolition permit, changing the historic question's answer to 'Yes' from 'No,' though it was later changed back to 'Yes' on the town's online permit database, with no explanation.

See HOYLE Page 2



House demolished — what's next?
Neighboring efforts from West Place Animal Sanctuary aim to protect the land

EAST BAY LIFE





The former Lafayette House at 3118 Main Road was torn down on Wednesday, Dec. 18.

HOYLE: Former building official had worked for Tiverton since 2021

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On Monday, residents told town council members that they were incensed.

"It is particularly appalling and upsetting, and I'm wondering what the town is going to do when an application was altered by a member of this town, who is employed by this town, in order to try to cover up that someone missed the fact that this was a historic house," Main Road resident Amy McNamee asked.

Stachura and fellow Main Road resident Philip Zachary also criticized the destruction

of the house, saying that historic landmarks are part of why people come to live in Tiverton. And Stachura further criticized the building's official office for its treatment of the situation, saying he was gruffly greeted when he visited shortly the office after the home came down, to inquire about what happened.

"I asked if this was the office for issuing demolition permits, but I didn't get a straight answer," he said. "When I did get an answer I was told that there was nothing that the town could do, that the building was not listed in the National Registry of Historic Places."



RICHARD PETRIN
Fire fighters (from left) Jason DaSilva, Bryan Dupere and Matt Hughes meet with Otto and his owner, Nancy Clark, on Thursday, Jan. 2.

OTTO: Dog's rescue was first on ice in at least two years

From Page 1

put him in the rescue and turned the heat on full blast. He was in the water for maybe 40 minutes or so; I don't know how much longer he would have made it."

Though department members train with their exposure suits and rescue sleds regularly, they haven't had to use them on a rescue in more than a year — there wasn't any ice last

winter. But the kind they saw on Christmas — just thick enough to be dangerous — "that's when you have a rescue," the chief said.

After warming up Otto, fire fighters sent him on his way. But they saw him again Thursday, when Clark brought him by the station for a visit. While she was there she gave department members a batch of Christmas cookies, chocolate and peppermint.

"I'm afraid to try because I'm going to devour them," the chief said.

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