

IF YOU GO

STAYING THERE

Pleasant Springs Farm

16112 Barnesville Rd.,
Boys
301-972-3452
www.pleasant-springsfarm.com
Restored 1768 log cabin just up the street from Star Gazing Farm. \$175 including breakfast.

Turf Valley

2700 Turf Valley Rd.,
Ellicott City
410-465-1500
www.turfvalley.com
About 12 miles from Days End. Weekend doubles from \$179.

EATING THERE

Comis Inn at Sugarloaf Mountain

23900 Old Hundred Rd., Dickerson
301-349-5100
www.thecomusinn.com
At the historic Johnson-Wolfe Farm. Entrees from \$17.

Woodbine Inn

401 Woodbine Rd.,
Woodbine
410-489-5750
Restaurant and sports bar with plenty of fried seafood, pizza and fried chicken in portions of eight pieces (\$8.99) up to 100 (\$110).

VOLUNTEERING THERE

Star Gazing Farm

16760 Whites Store Rd.,
Boys
301-349-0802
www.stargazingfarm.org
Contact farm for next volunteer training sessions. See Web site for farm wish list or to sponsor an animal.

Days End Farm Horse Rescue

1372 Woodbine Rd.,
Woodbine
301-854-5037
www.defhr.org
Volunteer orientation 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on second Saturday and fourth Tuesday of every month. Free tours daily, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

MARYLAND RESCUE FARMS

A little TLC goes a long way

BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN

The first thing I learned upon arriving at Star Gazing Farm in Boyds is that roosters don't save their cock-a-doodle-dos for daybreak.

My friend Dave and I had come to the animal sanctuary for volunteer training so that we could return in the future to help out at the farm. A few months ago, when we'd found an abandoned dog in the middle of Pennsylvania Avenue in downtown Washington, we'd been reminded of how many creatures don't get enough TLC. So to do my tiny part in making the animal kingdom a better place, I signed us up for volunteer orientation at the rescue farm, one of a growing number of places that provide medical care, a safe home and a healthy environment for abused and neglected animals.

"So ... there's a goat approaching us," said Dave, the archetypal city mouse, as we walked up the gravel driveway past vocal roosters and ducks in kiddie pools. "What do we do now?"

Before I had a chance to answer, Newman, an 8-year-old Alpine goat, was upon us, rubbing his horns against Dave's side. And it wasn't long before Dave was sweet-talking Newman, telling him he was a good boy and finding all his favorite scratching spots.

Star Gazing is a 4½-acre farm between Germantown and Poolesville. After a career as a linguist, owner Anne Shroeder decided that she wanted some land. In the eight years since she bought the farm, her family has grown from a couple of animals to several dozen. Some show up as strays (such as Newman, who tweets, by the way: @mrnewmangoat). Others come from owners who either can't afford to care for them or don't know how (such as the Polish chickens that were kept in a Frederick townhouse). To run the farm, Shroeder relies largely on donations. And she maintains a long wish list (bungee cords, water buckets, a horse trailer).

We walked to the barn, and Shroeder explained the animal hierarchy: Sheep are at the bottom of the totem pole, but they can still show humans a thing or two. "Huckleberry will headbutt you if he perceives you're a threat to his flock," she said, as the round sheep (who arrived at the farm with his brother when they were a day old) stood at her side and Dave inched away.

We learned how to hold a chicken (under your arm like a football) and then met Dee Dee the miniature Sicilian donkey (adopted to be a guardian for the sheep and the goats) and Teturo the potbellied pig (a stray from Beltsville). "He's wagging his tail," Dave said, as the pig sauntered over for a treat. "That's fantastic."

After our informal training, and after New-



MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN

Volunteers help with a goat at Star Gazing Farm, which relies on donations to care for its animals.



M.K. CANNISTRA/THE WASHINGTON POST

GETTING THERE

To Star Gazing Farm: Boyds is about 35 miles northwest of Washington. Take Interstate 270 north to Exit 15B (Germantown Road south). Go two miles and turn right onto Route 117 West/Clopper Road. Turn right onto Whites Store Road, then left into the first gravel driveway and look for the red farm gates.

To Days End Farm: Woodbine is about 55 miles north of Washington. Take the Baltimore-Washington Parkway north. Merge onto MD 32 west, then onto I-70 west toward Frederick. Take Exit 73 toward Woodbine/Lisbon; follow signs to Woodbine/Route 94, taking the second turn off the traffic circle. The farm is less than a quarter-mile on the right.

man took a bite from my notebook, we watched Shroeder give the animals their deworming medicine and trim their hooves. She and two male volunteers leaned Newman hard against a wall so that she could get to his feet. "Newman! Dude," she said in a brief moment of exasperation. I helped by leaning my knee into his thigh so he couldn't kick, and Shroeder got to work trimming. "Okay," she said, "other footsie!"

Next was Parsnip, a 230-pound sheep that Shroeder single-handedly toppled over. She clipped Parsnip's hooves and examined her eyes,

ears and teeth. "Almost done, my love," Shroeder said. "Can I get a kiss? That's a good girl."

On another weekend, I ventured back to farm country for volunteer training at Days End Farm Horse Rescue in Woodbine, about 30 miles northeast of Star Gazing. Our class was more than 100 strong, with families, a Girl Scout troop and plenty of "horsey people," as Caroline Robertson, the volunteer coordinator, called them. We sat on bales of hay, learning about grooming, body language and stages of horse rescue.

With 58 acres, about 70 horses and 1,500 active volunteers, Days End is a huge operation. We heard a lot of horror stories: the 26 horses that were seized from Garrett County in May (where horse carcasses were found among the emaciated survivors); the owner who thought that a proper horse diet was banana peels and Doritos; and cases in which owners were fined and sentenced to prison for abuse.

Robertson used props to teach us about neglect, including a horse foot on which the hooves had grown too long, curling up like the Wicked Witch's shoes (painful and damaging to the animal). When horses are rescued from an abusive situation, it can take four to six months of care and rehabilitation to restore them to health.

Volunteers do everything at Days End, from building barns to cleaning feed buckets. We were warned that we would occasionally go home with bruises (especially of the hoof-shaped variety), and we definitely would go home dirty.

After a tour and a chance to lead a horse named Mud Muffin across the training ring (he was rescued at four months, malnourished and living in mud), I cleaned the manure off my shoes. No surprise that driving back to Washington, I had animals on the brain. But I also couldn't stop thinking about the humans, both the ones who neglect and abuse animals, and those who perform miracles to bring them back to life. As I headed home to my city mice, I was thankful for these miracle workers. Not to mention Newman, Parsnip and all the pretty horses.

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● **Sunday in Travel: The Impulsive Traveler goes to port at Boston's Harbor Islands.**