

Five Questions With: Wendy Taylor



Practicing attorney Wendy Taylor has been the executive director of the West Place Animal Sanctuary in Tiverton since 2008. Here she is seen with one of the creatures rescued by the sanctuary.

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Practicing attorney Wendy Taylor has been the executive director of the West Place Animal Sanctuary in Tiverton since 2008. An aspiring author, she also has been a sitting member of her town's Zoning Board of Review since 2010. Here she discusses the nonprofit's direction and challenges.

PBN: How did you come to start the West Place Animal Sanctuary?

TAYLOR: At the beginning of my legal career, I had wanted to practice environmental law in the hopes of making a positive impact on wildlife, among other things. I have enjoyed 20 great years focusing on medical malpractice law, but knew that I had to work animal protection into my life to maintain a healthy balance.

After surviving a devastating house fire in 2003, wherein I lost all my pets, I knew that it was time to start to give back. A friend suggested that I donate to a foundation, but I am a bit more hands-on than that, so I began the sanctuary. What began as a small endeavor now helps more than 200 animals each year, both wildlife in need of rehabilitation and neglected farm animals.

PBN: Which animals are your most popular “residents” and why?

TAYLOR: That is easy to answer. Anyone who is familiar with us is a huge fan of an alpaca named Bobbert. He came to us from a traveling petting zoo at about 6 months old. Because he was handled so often, he is extremely interactive and charming. It has been suggested that he have his own social media account.

We have been asked to have him model bow ties for one business, and he will be participating in a photo shoot along with some of the other residents this spring for a future local “beachy” clothing line called “Saved Kisses.”

We also have a wild turkey whose photo has graced the pages of the Rhode Island Bar Journal and several newspapers. Of course, all of our residents are special, each with their own distinct and unique personalities and dispositions.

PBN: Describe some of your educational programming and how many students or schools it benefits.

TAYLOR: We offer volunteering opportunities to both adults and youth. Students can earn their required community service hours with us. Our educational approach is to learn while we work. We teach everything from animal welfare to minor repairs to vegetable farming, as we also grow some of the food we feed our wildlife.

In addition to high school students, we have also partnered with Bryant University to work with marketing students in developing their public relations skills, as exposure is a necessary part of any nonprofit.

PBN: How does the mix of paid and volunteer staff support your cause?

TAYLOR: We have always been proud of the fact that almost every person involved with us is a volunteer, including me. It is important to our organization that the funds we raise are put directly toward feeding, caring for and rehabilitating the animals.

PBN: What is your most reliable way to raise funds and your biggest fundraising challenge?

TAYLOR: We would not have had the ability to grow the way we have if it was not for the support of foundations like the Rhode Island Foundation. They have been invaluable in their grant awards over the years and we cherish relationships like theirs.

With respect to fundraising, the biggest challenge is time, especially when our main focus is the daily care of the animals. A small nonprofit like ours can get stretched thin rather quickly. Although we have an operating board, our next goal is the creation of an executive board – a handful of individuals skilled in fundraising, event planning and donations – to help us reach our next level.