Masleña Rescue Foundation Home to Hundreds of Animals

By Tania Soussan

When Jeff Morewood heard about a horse in need of a home back in 1999, he didn't know it would be the start of a years-long endeavor to rescue horses and other animals. He adopted Sassy, a black and white mare, and took her home to love and care for.

Photo by Shay Tong Van

Today, he and Tori Maxey run the nonprofit Masleña Rescue Foundation in Tijeras. About 250 horses, cows, llamas and other animals run free on 22 acres. Alpacas, goats, sheep, turkeys, dogs and cats, roosters, and peacocks also have been rescued by Morewood and Maxey and will live out their lives at the sanctuary.

"Sassy kind of started this whole dream really," said Morewood, 58. "She was my first rescue. … I just wanted to have a horse to live with me, someone to love."

Masleña is one of several farm animal sanctuaries in the East Mountains. Misfits of Oz Farm Sanctuary in Edgewood specializes in pigs, while Santuario de Karuna is home to a variety of animals. Roots Animal Sanctuary is just starting up. Sunflower Animal Sanctuary Rescue in Tijeras takes in older dogs, mini horses, donkeys and goats. In Stanley, New Mexico Horse Rescue at Walkin

Photo by Shay Tong Van

N Circles Ranch, Inc. rehabilitates and retrains abandoned, abused and neglected equines. The ranch normally has about 50 horses at a time and, unlike the sanctuaries, adopts out horses.

At Masleña, Morewood and Maxey care for the animals seven days a week, organize educational programs and host visitors. Animals come to them in a variety of ways, some from people who could no longer take care of their horses in the difficult days after COVID and others from abuse or neglect situations, for example.

They've invested their own money in the sanctuary, are pursuing grants and also have turned to GoFundMe. Some funding comes from the state and from other groups such as Animal Protection of New Mexico.

"It's still a very tough haul right now because of the economy," Morewood said as a rooster crowed in the background. "We run totally off donations. … We don't pay ourselves. Everything goes to support the animals."

A dedicated team of about 40 volunteers turns up to help out every week. They mix feed for the chickens and peacocks, lug water to fill troughs in the winter months, and help distribute hay bales and specialized diets to those who need them.

"I've always loved taking care of animals," Morewood said. "Watching animals bloom and thrive in a new environment is very rewarding to me. I try to share that with other people."

Visitors are welcome by appointment but are asked to sign a liability agreement. They can learn the basics of animal

husbandry and meet the animals. Maxey also is developing new programs such as teaching people how to shear their own sheep and helping them desensitize their own horses to alpacas and llamas through exposure – something that's important for trail ride safety.

Working with children is a passion for both Morewood and Maxey. They want to get young people off their electronic devices and teach them animal safety, how to brush the horses and more. They work with Big Brothers Big Sisters, the Youth Conservation Corps and other organizations.

Maxey, 31, grew up in Belen and always wanted a horse. She pursued a music career and sang with the Oak Ridge Boys, but her life changed when she adopted her first horse, Diesel, and when she met Morewood.

"These animals change your life," she said. "Here, they can be who they are, and they can interact with you. They're not scared. It's an amazing thing."

Morewood and Maxey said they're glad there are other animal sanctuaries in the area because so many animals need help.

Nearby, Tamara Renea Hubbard cares for 48 animals at the nonprofit Santuario de Karuna, a five-acre facility that also is funded through private donations.

"It's my job. … I wake up with them. They're part of my life," Hubbard said. "Most of them have come from animal agriculture so they were destined to become food."

Volunteers help with special projects. Visitors are welcome by