Woodstock Farm Sanctuary is in High Falls, NY, about 100 miles North of New York City. Founded in 2004, it is, as the name indicates, a sanctuary for farm animals. We spoke with Hervé Breuil, shelter director, and Liz DeFeo, marketing and communications manager, to find out more about the work the sanctuary does in general, and specifically, about Fawn, the rescued cow; Derrick Campana of Bionic Pets was instrumental in resolving her challenging mobility issues.

First, we discussed sanctuary population. At the time of the interview the Sanctuary housed 365 animals; Breuil said the population varies from around 350 to 450. They rescue animals, and then some animals may be placed elsewhere. Some go to other sanctuaries that have room, while others go to individuals. He stressed that they maintain very strict standards for placement to individuals, including a home visit.

Every animal sanctuary has challenges and Woodstock is no exception. Their biggest challenge is financial; although the Executive Director and the Development Director do an amazing job fundraising, it costs a lot to maintain the level of care the animals require and deserve. When asked what kind of animals are the biggest challenge to care for, the answer, surprisingly, was chickens. Breuil explains, “One of the most expensive animals we take in are chickens and you know the Cornish breed, which is the meat breed, they have a lot of health issues, they are quite expensive to take care of, and they require frequent vet visits.” Another issue, one that most farm sanctuaries face, is how to deal with geriatric farm animals. Veterinarians lack experience because the farm animals they normally treat are young; they are slaughtered at an early age. In his words, “A lot of vets don’t know much about how to treat the dairy cow who is 17 years old because they’ve never seen one before, or how to treat a meat bird, a Cornish rooster who is 8 years old because they have never seen a rooster that old before, and so we have to be very creative in the way we treat the animals because often vets just don’t know what to do.”

Staffing comes from several sources. Woodstock has 28 paid full-time employees, 4 seasonal workers, and approximately 400 unpaid volunteers. In addition, they run an internship program. Breuil comments they couldn’t survive without the volunteers because of the size of the property. DeFeo adds, “We have an internship program alongside our volunteer program and the interns are very important, especially for the shelter team, for the daily operations of the sanctuary because we are on 150 acres. We only use 63 of them but it’s still a pretty big property. Interns and volunteers are crucial to our operations.”

Asked what they were proudest of, Breuil’s immediate response was their number of annual visitors. “I think we are probably the most visited sanctuary in the United States, which means probably in the world. We had 12,000..."
We’re a social justice minded organization and we align ourselves with a lot of other movements.” Lizz DeFeo

it’s really proves the quality of care we are providing them.”

The animals also get a great quality of life. “What we really focus on is the friendships among the animals. When we had babies born here because their moms were rescued while pregnant we had baby goats and sheep who were born at the sanctuary. We rescued a mom pig with her piglets, and we make sure to keep all the family together. It’s amazing to see that even years later - like now I’m talking about the goats - four years later they are still very bonded – the families. And it’s only at the sanctuary that you can see this type of bond that can last, and you see also, even if they are not related directly, you see the bonds between them.”

Next Breuil comments on Derrick Campana of Bionic Pets and his work with a rescued cow named Fawn.

Derek is a specialist in the field so we were happy to be able to work with him. We switched to Derrick a couple of years ago. The prosthesis that he made were much lighter. Before that it was cumbersome and heavy, and in the summer, she would sweat in the prosthetic, which would cause other issues. Fawn was born on a dairy farm about 7 years ago and she fell in the manure pit. She broke one of her legs so the farmer didn’t want to keep her. But he knew somebody, a neighbor of his, who wanted a pet cow. He called up that woman, who came and picked up Fawn, but they live in uptown New York with a lot of dairy farms around. So, she called the vet, who really didn’t do much except for prescribing antibiotics. Fawn’s broken leg was not fixed. Having a broken leg, the other leg gave in too. That’s why she was not walking right. The woman had Fawn for 16 months, and then really good care of her. She slept with Fawn next to the wood stove when Fawn was a few days old.

Then when Fawn was 16 months old, the woman could not keep her any more. She had some personal issues so she called us. I went there, saw Fawn, and I realized she needed to go to Cornell right away. We did not bring her to the sanctuary. We picked her up and brought her to Cornell and she stayed at Cornell for a few months. They fused one of her knees, so they had to rebreak the leg, fuse one of her knees so it was straight, and then they tried to fix the other leg, but it was still a little bent. So consequently, her right leg is shorter. The right leg is straight, so it’s shorter. She needs a boot, that Derrick designed that makes the leg longer, and it makes it comfortable. And her left leg is really bent, so she needs some support, and this is why Derrick designed the brace to bring her the support that she needs.

Future goals may include expanding the Sanctuary and creating a Woodstock Two. The current property does not lend their sexual orientation or their color, or their nationalities – everybody is very welcome and on social media we share the struggles of other social justice movements and we participate in their struggles as well by, for instance, going to the Gay Pride in New York City. Or by hosting the Vegan of Color meetings and things like that. I think it’s really important because a lot of animal rights activists want to focus 100 percent on the animals and don’t want to talk about the people. We believe that all those struggles are the same struggle.”

DeFeo emphasizes that Woodstock is 100% donor support. Even a $5 contribution makes a difference. She adds, “We have all kinds of ways that people can support us, and even if they can’t support us through funds they can support us through becoming a volunteer. They can share our stories on social media. They can share emails. They can promote us in what-ever way they want to. To do what we do, to provide Fawn the quality of life she deserves, to work with Derrick, to continue to rescue animals and tend to 365 animals that live here we need funds.” This is especially true in winter months because costs are higher – buying hay and heating expenses add up quickly. She closes by talking about one aspect she feels is special about Woodstock. “We are a really great place to fall in love with farm animals. We just invite anybody to come visit, to come stay at our on-site inn called the Gray Barn which just opened in April of this year. The inn itself was basically a gift from a foundation as a source of revenue for the animals. We didn’t pay for the inn. It was from a foundation as a sustainable form of income. Basically, what I say to people as the marketing person is – I say that your stay is a form of advocacy because not only does the cost of your stay go to the animals but you also are supporting them by staying here walking on the tours included with your stay, meeting them. It’s an act of advocacy and kindness, so we have an on-site inn that people can stay at if they don’t necessarily want to drive up for the day. If they want to stay a couple days, they can stay at the Gray Barn, or they can come volunteer. We reopen technically in April. Our open season is April to October of every year but we do winter pop-ups. Volunteers are obviously welcome year-round as well as interns and Gray Barn guests. ‘We’ve included some photos so you can see the Gray Barn for yourself. What a great concept!”

For more information about the Sanctuary, go to: Woodstock Farm Sanctuary woodstocksanctuary.org

visitors last year and 92 percent of the people who took a tour decided to make a lifestyle change, not necessarily becoming vegan but at least reducing their consumption of animal products. I think we’ve been really good at making other vegans, and that is because people connect with the animals that we have.” In addition, “The other accomplishment for me as a center director is the quality of care we are able to provide and the age at which we can bring in the animals. We have a turkey center director is the quality of care we are able to provide and the age at which we can bring in the animals. We have a turkey who was 9 years old, a broad-breasted white who is 9. We have a steer coming from the dairy industry who is 17. We have Cor nish meat birds who are 8. Those numbers are unheard of, and

Executive Director Rachel Mcครystal with Fawn.

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7. Buddy, an 11 year-old goat, was rescued from North Carolina.
8. Harvey was rescued with his friend, March 1st in June 2019 from a box labeled “Discarded runts.”
9. Sunny was rescued with his main, Toni.
10. Shelter Director Hervé Brulil with one of the hens rescued from the Hudson Valley 100 chicken rescue in August 2018.
11. The Gray Barn, the Sanctuary’s onsite inn. PHOTO © MELISSA CACIOPPO
12. Interior of The Gray Barn. PHOTO © MELISSA CACIOPPO