

An oasis for abandoned, abused pigs

By Chris Church/Independent Staff Writer

NORTH KINGSTOWN — Driving down Ten Rod Road, it's impossible not to notice the house with more than a hundred lobster pot buoys covering the front lawn and a 1993 Lincoln Town car with "MOO" vanity license plates and a fiberglass model cow adorned to the roof.

And that's the way Audrey Agli and Liz Smith want it.

Since 1995 Smith & Agli's Potbelly Manor has rescued dozens of pot-bellied pigs that became too much of a chore for owners who could no longer afford to feed the animals or ran out of space to accommodate a 200-plus pound animal.

The wild, impossible-to-ignore-decorations are a way to draw attention to their cause and educate others about the responsibility of having pot-bellied pigs as pets.

Pot-bellied pigs, like more traditional pets, have distinct personalities. They are considered very intelligent animals (they listen to commands just like a dog) but can also be very stubborn. Some can grow close to 300 pounds.

"They get big, they don't want them, whatever, and then they call us," said Smith, who runs the 1-acre farm with her partner, Agli "People don't realize they don't stay 15 pounds. They get 50 to 100 pounds, sometimes over 250 pounds."

During an interview at the "manor" on Monday, with their enormous St. Bernard, Spirit lounging nearby, both Agli and Smith explained that many people are buying teacup pigs, which are advertised as miniature pigs that stay around 15 pounds, on a whim without educating themselves.

"The fad is coming back because every time I'm watching TV I see these advertisements for these teacup pigs," said Agli, who said teacup pigs were very popular in the 1980s.

Neither Agli nor Smith believe that teacup pigs are even an actual breed and many of the advertisements are only depicting piglets of pot-bellied pigs.

When the piglets begin growing or the responsibility becomes too much, owners look to get rid of them.

Located at 401 Ten Rod Road, next to the Paul Bailey's dealership, the property is currently home to eight pot-bellied pigs, along with a bull named Wickford, two llamas, two ducks, a turkey, a goat and about 38 pigeons.

Agli, who works in accounts and controls for the state, and Smith, who runs her own Tarot card reading business, did not set out to run a rescue for pot-bellied pigs when they first moved to the house, which is allowed to be used as a farm under a grandfather clause attached to the property.

They were the owners of their own pot-bellied pig but when they adopted another, named Skipper, they received their calling.

"He came to us so badly abused," recalled Smith. "He was bloodied. He was cut up. He was very badly abused. At that point we realized that we needed to do something and at that point is when we decided to rescue and after that, call after call would come in."

"Even if it's only one, it's one we saved from getting killed," said Agli.

After that, Agli and Smith took in dozens of pigs, all victim of some sort of abuse by the previous owners.

"It's crazy," said Agli. "It's just terrible. It's awful."

In an effort to both entertain and educate people, the couple brings Ariel, their therapy pig, to nursing homes and schools around the area.

"She's our little spokesperson," Agli said of Ariel, who weighs about 30 pounds and loves belly rubs.



Liz Smith (left) and her partner, Audrey Agli, pose with their pot-bellied pig, Ariel, at their home, Potbelly Manor, 401 Ten Road, North Kingstown. "She's our little spokesperson," said Agli. (Photo by Chris Church)

The average lifespan for a pot-bellied pig is about 15 years, according to Agli and Smith, and when running a shelter that provides food and medical care for multiple animals, the bills add up quickly.

Donation of money and time from volunteers are a big part of keeping Potbelly Manor operational, as are reduced rates from veterinarians, but that doesn't always cover all the costs.

Agli, who recently retired from the U.S. Air Force Reserves, said her military check was dedicated to the operation of the farm but now she will have to spend money from elsewhere in her budget for the farm.

For more information on Potbelly Manor or to donate, visit www.potbellymanor.org.

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