Norman

By: Rachael Komulainen, Park Animal Keeper

There is a handsome, popular red-head in the Hart Park barnyard, and he goes by the name of “Norman.” Norman is a 2,000 pound, red and white Holstein steer. He is nine years old, and he came to the park on July 22nd, 2009. Originally, as the tale goes, he was bought for the purpose of being slaughtered for food by a family. However, the kids in the family fell madly in love with him and his sweet disposition—as did other neighborhood kids—and so the heart-stealing bovine was placed with us here at Hart Park.

A few years ago, Norman was diagnosed with an inoperable and slow-growing tumor. Recently, he was re-checked by a vet and the type of tumor was revealed: an intra-abdominal lipoma. While it is inoperable, it does not prevent him from having a great quality of life. Norman loves attention and gets groomed by the barnyard staff every day—sometimes even twice a day! Plus, he eats his favorite grain and a variety of different types of hay. Life is real good, if you are Norman. He loves when visitors buy the pellets that are for sale in the vending machines or gift shop—waiting anxiously at the receiving end of the tube, while the pellets are dropped inside. Often times, I am asked when ‘she’ is due—in regards to the bulge on his right side, which looks similar to pregnancy. My response is: “It’s a steer.” This is usually followed up with: “Yeah but when is she due?” To which, I deadpan: “Well, it’s a boy, so…it’s probably going to be awhile…”

On September 5th, 2013, Norman had his hooves trimmed by a cow trimmer. Now, you would think this would not have been that big of a deal, however, because of Norman’s tumor, it was a huge deal. Typically, hoof trimmers have the tipping machines (which are used to tip the animal in order to get to the bottoms and sides of the hooves) that tip to the left. However, due to Norman’s tumor, he needed one that tipped to the right side—it needed to be tumor side down, so as not to crush his internal organs. After a very lengthy and aggressive search to find someone with a tipping machine to the right, I was able to locate only two (that I could find) people in all of the United States with these machines that tipped to the right side instead of the left. As luck would have it, they were two left-handed relatives that lived here in southern California. With a lot of persuasion and pulling on the heart strings—plus the financial support of the Friends Of Hart Park—we were able to secure one of the trimmers to come out and trim Norman’s hooves. It was quite an experience!

As the Park Animal Keeper, I can attest to the fact that Norman is by far the most popular animal in the Hart Park barnyard family. We have patrons that come every day just to check up on him and give him some love. He is truly our strongest animal ambassador for the park. I invite you to stop by and see Norman any time the barnyard is open, which is usually 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. (holiday schedule varies).