MEET OUR GERIATRICS!

By: Rachael Komulainen, Park Animal Keeper

Hart Park Barnyard has a long and proud distinction of appreciating our geriatric animal residents. I have been working in the animal field for a long time, and I can assure you that this is not the case, more often than not. Many animal facilities (i.e. zoos, animal parks, etc.) succumb to public pressure of exhibiting only the ‘young and pretty’ specimens. While that may seem harmless in theory, the reality is that a lot of the older animals end up getting euthanized – not because of health issues or a lack of quality of life, though. They are disposed of because they no longer fit the ‘image’ the facility is trying to portray to the public. To me, this is unacceptable. Those animal residents provided a service – and increased profits – for the facility for so long, that their continued care should be required, in my opinion. So…that is another reason why Hart Park stands out from the crowd! Yes, we have many older residents that may not fit the ‘young and pretty’ standards for many facilities but, for us, they are family. We love our seniors! We work with two primary vets, along with other specialized vets as needed, to ensure that our animals live as long as possible, with the best possible quality of life. Animals, like people, can live with medical conditions and still have a great quality of life! Okay, let’s meet some of our senior residents.

“Gracie” – Gracie is a female, wild boar. She is 15 years old. In the wild, 10 years old is usually the maximum. In captivity, a healthy boar can live up to 20 years old. She is definitely a senior citizen! Gracie was diagnosed with mammary cancer last fall. Cancer leads to weight loss in pigs, just like it does in people -- and she has lost a lot of weight lately from her cancer. However, she still has a good appetite and is getting spoiled daily with her favorite foods! Her time may be coming to a close but she is still enjoying life with her belly rubs, showers on hot days, and getting loads of attention from her doting fans.

“Norman” – Norman is a male, red & white Holstein. He is 12 years old, and for a steer, that is old! Generally, steer go to slaughter (since they are castrated bulls and not used for breeding/reproducing). Holsteins are known for their large size and prominent hip bones. Norman originally came to Hart Park from a family that had gotten him to raise and slaughter for food. However, Norman charmed him – like he does to all who meet him – and they didn’t have the heart to eat him. So, in July of 2009, he was donated to the park. Well-taken care of cattle can live as long as 15 years old but, typically, they live until 10-12 years of age. Norman does have some health conditions that he lives with. He has arthritis in his legs, which has slowed him down but not stopped him. He receives medicine every day to treat it. Also, he was diagnosed with a non-malignant tumor that he has been living with for years. It isn’t operable but it grows slowly and allows him to still have a good life. In fact, I still chuckle to myself every time I have a patron that asks when ‘she’ is “due.” I tell them that Norman is a steer. And, then they follow-up with: “Yeah, but when is she due?” Apparently, the tumor on his right side makes him look pregnant! Norman is by far the star attraction of the barnyard. For our regular park patrons, he is the gentle giant that greets them, as they stroll through the barnyard. Norman enjoys getting groomed every single morning by the barnyard staff and he greatly enjoys all of the visitors that buy pellets for him to eat. The reality is that Norman is also in the twilight of his life but, man oh man, has it been a good one for him!

“Isabella” – Isabella is a female, White Embden goose. She was hatched in 1998, so she now 19 years old! These types of domestic geese can actually live 20-25 years. She is definitely the matriarch of our five geese, even though she ‘allows’ Javier (our dominant male) to believe he is in charge. One of the highlights of the barnyard is the daily goose march from their enclosure to the duck pond. Every day, they get some time to swim in the big pond, before returning to their own enclosure for the evening. If you watch the march, you will see the bigger female, Isabella, limping a little on her left leg. She has age-related arthritis in her left foot. The vet has injected a steroid to help with the arthritis.

We invite you to come visit Gracie, Norman, Isabella and everyone else in the Hart Park Barnyard! The barnyard is open every day from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. (exceptions: Christmas Day-closed; all other holidays-closed at 2:30 p.m.). Life is better when you share it with animal friends!!!