**Critter Corner**

*by Rachael Komulainen*

*Park Animal Keeper*

New Beginnings

Whenever there are endings in life, there are also beginnings. With the passing of longtime Barnyard residents Norman and Gracie, two enclosures became available. The first enclosure was the double-sized one, where Norman resided. We had been considering different types of animals for that enclosure but with a goal of introducing something new to the park. Our main goal has always been education, so bringing new types of animals into the existing facility was a keen prospect. Additionally, we strive for win/win situations. By this I mean, if we can help someone else out in their situation (for example, rescuing animals in need of a new home), that is an added benefit. As fate would have it, we came upon a situation that worked out perfectly for all involved. As a result, we ended up taking in five female alpacas on April 19th. All five girls are different colors, with two mamas and three offspring. What a delight to get these beautiful girls! I let my Barnyard staff name them, with the only condition being that the names all start with the letter ‘C.’ They chose: “Cruella” for the gray mama; “Carma” for her daughter, the brown one with white on her face; “Clarice” for the black mama; “Coco” for the dark brown daughter; and “Chanel” for the light brown daughter. The Friends of Hart Park purchased new lead ropes and halters for each of them (THANK YOU, FOHP!!), and we have been getting them out regularly for walks around the park. Also, they were sheared for the season on May 22nd. We are hoping to sell their fleece, once it has been processed into yarn, in the Hart Park Gift Shop.

The second enclosure available for new occupancy was where Gracie had been housed. Over two years ago, a local resident had approached me about taking his two Sulcata tortoises, if we had space. Since that time, I had been considering that possibility. Tortoises are not the typical ‘barnyard’ animal. However, I believe that William S. Hart was a visionary. He defended animal rights in the movies before there were official protections. And, he had the foresight to leave his estate as a gift to the public, instead of just passing it along to family and having its historical value get lost along the way. He thought ‘outside the box.’ As an Animal Advocate and Educator, I value all animals – not just the furry and cuddly kind. Reptiles are often misunderstood and feared, often times, without good reason. I believe that Mr. Hart would applaud the Barnyard embracing something new and exciting, that educates and promotes welfare of all animals. Therefore, on April 20th, we welcomed our two new Sulcata tortoises into the Barnyard. They were appropriately named “Bill” and “Mary Ellen” – after Bill Hart and his sister Mary Ellen Hart. Since tortoises can live to be up to 150 years old (and ours are only 17 and 15, respectively), the legacy of Bill and Mary Ellen will continue on for many future generations. Now, that is a legacy that we can all be proud of!