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Friday, July 7, 2023

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Elderly pig's future in peril after complaint to SPCA



Marjolyn and Frans Winkel with the 18-year-old pig on their farm next to the Lochside Trail. The couple say the pig is happy and well cared for, despite a complaint to the SPCA. **DARRIN STONE, TIMES COLONIST**

CARLA WILSON
 Times Colonist

The owners of an elderly pig living next to the Lochside Trail have been ordered by the SPCA to either get her checked by a vet or have her euthanized, following a complaint from a member of the public.

But Frans and Marjolyn Winkel say their 18-year-old sow is not in pain, and they want her to live out her life as the last pig among many generations produced on their nine-acre Saanich Peninsula farm.

On July 5, an SPCA officer came to the farm with a notice giving them five days to have a vet look at the pig or have her euthanized.

The Winkels received a similar notice from the SPCA last year and paid for a veterinarian to check out their pigs. At the time, they had another older sow, which has since died. Domestic pigs typically live 15 to 20 years.

The matter was resolved after the vet sent a letter to the SPCA, the Winkels said.

The pig has a chronic but treatable skin condition brought on by old age, the Winkels said, but is not in pain, has a healthy appetite and comes when called.

"She is old and she has a skin condition but she is in perfect health," Frans said. "She is happy."

Her days are filled with eating and sleeping and wallowing in her muddy pond, which also helps to protect her skin, the Winkels said.

Every morning, Frans sprays the sow's sore spots with a vet recom-

mended product to deter flies and reduce itching, he said.

Now that there's been a second complaint, they fear they will continue to face complaints, resulting in more unaffordable vet fees.

As a result, Frans said, they may end up euthanizing the pig this week.

He said he is not angry with the SPCA and does not blame it for the situation. "They have to do their job."

The pig, a cross between a Danish Landrace and Duroc, is popular with trail users, who frequently stop for a visit and photos.

Marjolyn said some people have told her they visited the farm's pigs when they were children and are now bringing their own children to see the sow. She's also a popular attraction for motorists, including a bus from a senior's home that does drive-bys. One woman stops by with marshmallows as a treat, Frans said.

Frans, 86, and Marjolyn, 82, have kept pigs for more than half a century and are well-known in the local farming community.

They moved to Canada from the Netherlands in 1964. Frans worked as a gardener in Oak Bay and the couple ran the farm together.

As pig farmers, they mainly sold weaners — piglets recently weaned from their mothers — to local farmers.

Frans has judged pigs on Salt Spring Island for the 4-H in the past, said Marjolyn, who has written a book called *Farm Tales*, largely featuring stories about their pigs.

At times, they were the only ones who brought a sow and piglets to the Saanich Fair, she said.

Eileen Drever, senior officer in protection and stakeholders relations for the B.C. SPCA, said in an email that she is unable to discuss open investigations, but when the SPCA receives a call of concern about an animal, one of its animal protection officers attends and determines if the complaint is valid.

The officer may issue a notice to relieve distress, Drever said.

"Failure to do so could result in the officer taking legal action, which could include the application and execution of a warrant to search to remove the animal in distress."

"If the complaint is unfounded then the officer will close the file."

Marjolyn suggests that if members of the public have questions about an animal, they should speak with the farmers, who can explain the situation.

In the meantime, the pig has inadvertently prompted an informal free food supply next to the trail.

The couple gets unwanted produce from stores, sorts it and sets out better quality produce for people to take for free. Whatever is left over goes into the pig pen.

An array of produce went Thursday to the pig, who enthusiastically dug into a large selection, including oranges, melons and broccoli, while making soft grunting sounds.

Marjolyn jokes that the pig is "our composting machine."

If the pig dies, there won't be much need for the daily produce collection or food sharing, although the couple has some horned Dorset sheep that are fond of apples.

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New evidence revives search for hiker missing near Sooke

JEFF BELL
 Times Colonist

The search for a hiker who went missing last December in the Sooke area is set to resume on Saturday after new information was discovered, police said.

Juan de Fuca Search and Rescue plans to redeploy in "a concentrated and refined area of interest" that was searched after Melissa McDevitt went missing.

Data from McDevitt's smartwatch has helped narrow down the area to be searched, CHEK News reported.

People are being asked to avoid the area to accommodate search efforts.

McDevitt, 38, an avid hiker, was last seen on surveillance video Dec. 9 carrying hiking poles in the Charters Creek fish hatchery parking lot on Sooke River Road, a few kilometres from Sooke Potholes. She had been due to fly to North Carolina on Dec. 10 to visit family.

Her grey Subaru Forester was found on Dec. 10 in the parking lot after she was reported missing.

An extensive search of the sometimes rugged and steep terrain in the area, led by Juan de Fuca Search and Rescue and involving 17 search agencies, was conducted over nine days and included Sooke RCMP, RCMP Dog Services and RCMP Air Services. Searchers put in a combined total of about 5,000 hours in one of the largest searches on the Island.

McDevitt's father flew in from North Carolina to join the search of Sea to Sea Regional Park; the search was suspended Dec. 19.

Since then, Sooke RCMP say they have maintained an active missing-person investigation and have stayed in close contact with McDevitt's family.

"There has been an outpouring of support for Melissa and her family since she went missing," said Sgt. Kevin Shaw, acting Sooke RCMP detachment commander. "The RCMP and Melissa's family sincerely appreciate the public's assistance and continued efforts to find Melissa to this point."

Anyone with information on McDevitt's disappearance is asked to call Sooke RCMP at 250-642-5241.

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Melissa McDevitt, 38, has been missing since December. **VIA VICTORIA POLICE**

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