

Light Center Foundation Highlights 2011

“Rescued Animals, Rescuing Kids”



From the Directors Desk

Each year I get the dubious task of “mentioning” how happy we’d be if our loyal donors would remember us in their holiday giving~ It comes with the director’s cap. But I will readily admit it’s one of the least favorite things I do all year. It goes without saying that the economy continues to plague us all, and not-for-profits have suffered way beyond the proverbial “short end of the financial stick.” It’s frustrating on both ends. Those who need, need even more. And those who have are trying desperately to hold on to what they’ve worked so hard to get. I wish I had a magic wand~ I’d truly bring this crisis to an end. But as I write I’m also reminded that in good times and bad, we’ve seen over 1500 kids through the Light Center doors. ...that’s individual names, I might add. We also totaled all the kids through the doors on return trips and counted well over 9000! So when I look at it that way, perhaps we’ve had “enough” after all. We’ve had enough to do our work for 12 years, we’ve had enough to help and befriend thousands of needy and troubled kids, we’ve had enough to feed and house our wonderful animal staff, and we’ve had the really profound honor of having “enough” to make a difference in so many lives. We don’t really know what 2012 will bring for the Light Center; it’s tough times and there’s not “enough” in the coffers that’s for sure. But my own glass is half full, not half empty because this work has given me so much more than “enough.” I wish you all the joy of feeling such satisfaction. And I wish you all “enough” in 2012!

Jan Cederlund

Please consider the Light Center if you’re able to make a holiday remembrance~
You have our sincerest gratitude for making us your charity of choice!

Name as it appears on Credit Card: _____ Donation: \$ _____

Visa / MasterCard (or Check #) _____ Exp. _____

Your Address: _____

Light Center is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization—your donation is tax deductible!

THANK YOU!!!





Volunteer

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Volunteer Corner, Newsletter Winter 2011

Throughout the past year Light Center volunteers have once again met needs in so many “behind the scenes” ways. Rain or shine, volunteers give their time despite busy work schedules, travel, sports team commitments, tight college class schedules, and so much more. Their hard work is so appreciated as they give back to their community in such a concrete way. We can only say THANK YOU so many times, but we hope highlighting a few of them will show our gratitude.

JEAN HORLOCK

We’ve highlighted Jean in past issues so we’d like to use the space below to feature a few of our other unsung heroes. However... Jean has continued to be a dedicated and ongoing “friend of the Light Center,” and has given of herself in countless volunteer ways. We were very pleased to announce at our annual fundraiser, that Jean was once again named as the 2011 volunteer of the year!



Volunteers Jean Horlock and Justin Wilk

MIKE CLARK

We were delighted to welcome Mike Clark who brought a winning combination of handyman skills and spare time on his hands! Mike has assisted with a wide variety of “fix it” projects around the farm and has generously offered sage advice on how best to address maintenance needs with the materials at hand. In addition to winterizing and de-winterizing tasks, Mike has...

- Fixed flat tires on the wheelbarrows
- Quieted squeaky stall doors & helped doors to glide smoothly
- Stopped the front door window from teetering in its frame, and helped a Sun City Woodchuck to custom build trim to match the back door window (for which we are SO thankful!!!)
- Assembled a new larger chicken coop condo so the chickens can sleep well at night
- Repaired gutters to keep the small animal paddock ice free
- Freshened up the barn with a new coat of paint (alongside many volunteers)
- Made numerable trips to the hardware store, and many, many other jobs! Thank you Thank you, Mike!!

SHELBY PERKINS

As a recent high school graduate with some horse skills and a desire to have a summer job experience, Shelby Perkins was a natural fit to join us for the warmer months. Shelby helped to lighten the load on many mornings throughout the summer as she assisted in feeding and cleaning chores. Shelby also got to broaden her horizons by spending time in the garden; learning just how time consuming it is to keep it weed free without the use of harmful herbicides. Shelby’s willing attitude and cheerful personality were much appreciated as she helped out wherever needed, including fallen apple pickup. It’s amazing how many apples can fall of a little tree day after day! We are also grateful to Shelby’s parents who actively supported her volunteer experience throughout the summer. We hope she keeps us posted as she moves on to other adventures as a young adult.

AmeriCorps Members Enjoy a Summer on the Farm!

In the summer of 2011, the Light Center was delighted to serve as a recognized “Member Site” for a host of AmeriCorps members. The AmeriCorps volunteers divided their time between service projects like the garden and barn painting and working with youth in our summer programs. A great big thank you to Justin, Kim, Kaitlyn, Faith, Zach, Luis, Angela, Chrissy, Elyse and Sara! All total, ten members served, logging an amazing **571 volunteer hours!** Needless to say, our organic garden looked fantastic and the fresh coat of paint made the barn look new! The overall goal of AmeriCorps of McHenry County is to build academic and social supports for identified youth with risk factors such as diagnosed mental illness, gang involvement, Latino youth, and those eligible for free and reduced lunch. AmeriCorps members provided tutoring, and mentoring activities in after school programs throughout the County, as well as promote interaction with the community through service projects. Members benefit by developing marketable job skills in the social service/education field, and develop leadership and teambuilding skills overall.

VOLUNTEERS ROCK!

In her own words...

Participant Paige reflects on the meaning and purpose of the Light Center

A high school student, Paige, reflected on her experience as she finished up her sessions at the Light Center recently. She selected Quest the horse, and Toto the donkey, to help her express her thoughts.

Quest has a purpose as a therapy horse even though his days as a competitive dressage horse are behind him, he still has value. The same holds true for Toto, although his specific purpose is to add CHARISMA to the small herd. (That comment and descriptive vocabulary tickled the staff!) Just like the animals, Paige believes that she has a purpose to have compassion and understanding for her own community. Paige believes that the most meaningful thing to the animals is to have the love of a friend. This is similar to Paige's own connection to the people and animals in her life. It comes from an understanding that everyone deserves love regardless of their history.

Paige believes that the TLC animals help participants because they can relate to the animals as if they were humans. It's important to realize that everyone, every animal is meaningful, every animal has some love to give. Paige has found her time at TLC meaningful because even though the animals are furry and can't talk with words, they are just like us and have love to give. Paige defines her meaning in life as having a purpose, something to live for, as simple as family and friends. She now believes that her purpose in life is being needed or helpful, and to make her mom proud!

A Big Year for a Little Garden

Under the watchful eye of Jan, this year's garden was perhaps the best Light Center garden yet! It was a bit like watching Santa make a list and check it twice as Jan carefully considered just what should be planted this year. Broom corn was a must after the fun of making handmade brooms last year. Pumpkins, yep, we'd try again! ...although luck hadn't been on our side the last few years. To those staples Jan selected crops with sensory appeal; fragrant herbs, colorful veggies and tasty treats for the animals.

To our delight we were surprised with a bevy of volunteers for the whole summer; most from AmeriCorps. Jan moved the old TLC van to cleverly serve as a garden shed while volunteers spread tractor loads of soil. Hoses were stretched and staked, and enthusiastic planting began right on schedule. And each day the weed patrol worked their magic to insure a weed free garden without the use of harmful herbicides.

By mid summer we had a bumper crop! Cucumbers, rainbow chard, fragrant chives, oregano, and huge pumpkin vines hinting of things to come in the fall. Participants especially enjoyed sampling the basil and mint, and both participants and volunteers regularly went home with bags of cucumbers, (pickles anyone?) bundles of baby bok choy and stacks of tasty chard.

As the fall school year began, we were delighted with the variety of hearty tomatoes, garden beans with a colorful twist and beautiful beet tops whispering of their ruby colored prizes just under the soil. Not to mention a rainbow of carrots, colorful corn, sunflowers of all sizes, watermelons, squash and PUMPKINS!

Participants of all ages were endlessly enthusiastic to explore, harvest, sample and take home a bountiful variety of garden products. Many groups were amazed at the abundance of garden beans hiding under large protective leaves. The beans themselves were a crowd pleaser. They grow a deep purple, are sweet and crunchy to sample off the vine and turn green when cooked. Some school groups even tried the color change cooking experiment when they returned to their classrooms, watching the beans turn from purple to green in boiling water or spun lazily around in the microwave. Who said that kids don't like their vegetables? Probably the most satisfying part was seeing students, young and old, enthusiastically take home a bag of produce to share with their families; all too aware of how tight family budgets have become.

The best word for the 2011 garden; "inspiring!" And "growing" on that, we can't wait to see what 2012 will bring!



PETCO Rabbit Days

Angel, one of our bunny “staff members” got to enjoy being a demonstration rabbit when the Light Center was asked to spend some time at the PETCO store in Dundee as part of their rabbit awareness month. PETCO no longer sells rabbits but supports the “Think Adoption First” program. Angel, along with a couple of Light Center volunteers, greeted many PETCO customers and answered questions about the proper care and handling of rabbits. Angel was the star of the show, taking all of the attention in stride. One of the days overlapped with a low cost vaccine clinic at the store so Angel got to see lots of dogs, many of which were bully breed puppies walk by on their way to their vaccine appointment. He accurately assumed that they were all friendly! It may have even given him something to talk about with Leroy when he got back to the farm later that day.

LEROY is a snowbird...

hmmm, a “Snowbunz?”

Spending time in the barn during winter months didn't seem to agree with our comical and sweet rescue bunny Leroy last year. The barn doors stay closed and the stuffy air didn't help Leroy's sinuses. Since Leroy had certainly earned some extra TLC after his challenging start to life as a dog fight bait animal we decided to find Leroy a little slice of Florida right here in Illinois. We asked around and found a foster family for Leroy (thank you to former instructor Lindsey Hurre!), so Leroy is spending the winter as an urban house rabbit, cozy in his Chicago condo with Lindsey and family. He has such good manners that he is permitted to spend part of each day out and about, running laps around the house and snoozing in front of a cozy fire.



Lindsey says Leroy is “chill’n like a villain” in this photo!

The Littlest Therapist

He's very furry, too! That was one participant's explanation of Angel the bunny. This participant attends sessions with his local high school group and had appeared to be struggling more and more over the last few sessions. Like many of the teens we work with, he started his session with his shoulders slumped, hoodie over his head; sitting with his face buried in his arms at the table. Not the most promising start to a session!

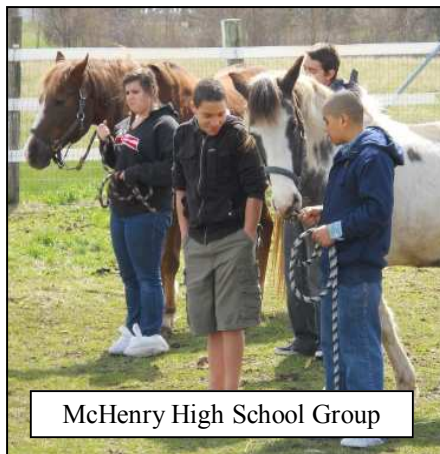
Typically, this participant would at least sit with the group and follow basic instructions. But this time, he wasn't attempting simple directions and when asked repeatedly to move closer to the group, he growled, “Or what?”

The group reflected on the one Light Center rule, respect, and how being even minimally cooperative was better than not at all. But sometimes a participant is just having a hard day (don't we all?) and gets sort of stuck in their disconnect from the group.

The group carried on with their activity outside while this young man remained slumped at the table. We continued to check in with him, but he continued to be unable/unwilling to join the group. Then, at some point, he was asked what *would* make him happy. “Angel,” came the muffled reply. This participant has identified Angel as his favorite TLC animal on other occasions, so once the group returned, the session took a segway to include some bunny time. Angel was placed within a group sitting at this young man's table. At first the change was subtle. Then, a single hand reached out to gently stroke Angel's soft fur. After a few minutes, his head came up to rest on his forearm while he watched Angel hop around the table. As Angel came over to wiggle his nose against the participant's nose, there it was... a smile. And that smile became an even bigger smile and soft laugh. The session was soon up and the other students left the table to wash their hands. Left at the table was the tough teenager, now sitting up, softly smiling and gently petting Angel.

“Looks like Angel helped?”, I asked the young man. ...A smile and a nod and a simple, “Yeah”. “Would this be a good way to start if you're having another tough day?” “Yeah”, he responded. Then the boy reminded me that he had two dogs at home that also helped him to feel better if he was feeling down... He spent a few more minutes with Angel and gave him a gentle hug. Then he willingly followed directions to wash his hands and rejoin the group.

This is the beauty of animal-assisted therapy. Conflict, challenge, hostility; all avoided. And the simple connection to the animal makes all the difference. Our little therapist with the big ears accomplished in minutes what many therapists can't do in a year. We'll say no more~



McHenry High School Group



Participant Chris with Rosie

This article wasn't written about the Light Center, but it might have been...

It's a wonderful reflection on a similar agency in our field, and a great example of what we already know at the Light Center; animals *can* heal in so many ways! Enjoy the read!



In the Company of Animals,

Healing for Humans

By KAREN JONES Published: Nov. 1, 2011

SOPHIE is a goat whose taste in books leans toward popular best sellers, says Solana Mejia-Schnauffer, who reads aloud to her several times a week. "I know she likes 'The Hunger Games' because she didn't try to eat it. That wasn't true of 'Animal Liberton.'" "

Miss Mejia-Schnauffer, 21, and Sophie met at the Gentle Barn, a six-acre ranch in Santa Clarita, Calif. The facility heals and rehabilitates abused farm animals and invites visitors with emotional and physical challenges to interact with them. Bonding with Sophie was "a life-changing experience," says Miss Mejia-Schnauffer, whose battle with depression and eating disorders led to a suicide attempt this year. She credits Sophie, a rescue from an abusive petting zoo, with making her recovery possible.

"Before I came to the Gentle Barn, nothing gave me hope that life was worth living," she says. "But when I met Sophie, I thought she had the most incredible calm and open energy. There was this flow of love back and forth between us that I was feeling so in need of."

Today Miss Mejia-Schnauffer volunteers at the Gentle Barn and has also become Sophie's "special person," visiting her at least twice a week to share companionship and a good book.

"Sophie is like my totem that I carry around with me all the time," she says. "Knowing I can see her has kept me alive."

The Gentle Barn is the fulfillment of a childhood dream, says its founder, Ellie Weiner: "I was one of those children that brought stray and injured animals home. My parents were not amused." She adds that it was her love of animals that helped her through her own abusive childhood. "The animals saved me and healed me. If they could do that for me, then they could do it for others."

In 1999, Ms. Weiner opened the barn doors to visitors, and she is well known for her programs for "at risk" youth, arranged through local family and children's services. Here, inner-city gang members, drug addicts and abused youngsters can feed a cow, hug a pig or just try to find peace in a pastoral setting. Before groups meet the animals, Ms. Weiner, or her husband, Jay Weiner, tell their stories of abuse and recovery.

This is critical to reaching troubled children, says Jamie Lynn Cantor, children's services administrator for the Department of Children and Family Services in northwest Los Angeles County. "They hear the recovery stories of these animals who, after their horrific abuse, have learned to love and trust again. More important, they learn there is hope for the future, and they can have a life filled with love and people to love them. They are not hopeless anymore." Ms. Cantor has been bringing groups of children in foster care to the Gentle Barn since 2008. She has seen many of them bond with a miniature pony named Bonsai, whose former owner, an alcoholic, beat him brutally.

"I can't tell you how many kids would identify with this and say, 'My mom used to do that.'" She adds that, though it took three years before Bonsai would trust people again, today he is a playful pony with a particular affinity for children with special needs.

"This is very unlike traditional therapy. There is no probing or rules," says Ms. Cantor, who recalls a young boy who befriended an enormous pig named Biscuit. "The boy had been sexually abused and was very withdrawn. As soon as he saw this pig, he started to open up a bit. He laid there next to Biscuit for two hours, hugging him and talking to him. This sad little boy experienced some healing and left smiling."

Ms. Cantor is compiling information for a survey she calls "Healing Youth Through Animals." So far, she says, the results of one visit to the Gentle Barn "reflect significant improvement in the youth's happiness, self-esteem, as well as decreases in anger, anxiety, hopelessness, depression and loneliness."

Dan McCollister is community relations director of Pacific Lodge Youth Services in Woodland Hills, Calif., a nonprofit facility that offers treatment for teenage males on probation. Most residents are gang members "on the cusp of a major life decision," says Mr. McCollister.

Continued on Pg 6~

In the Company of Animals

—Continued

“If they don’t change a few key things, they might end up spending their life in jail.” He adds that because boys join gangs at a young age, his organization faces years of negative conditioning. Twice a month, he brings groups to the Gentle Barn as part of his activities schedule. “We have between six and nine months with them to make something positive click. The Gentle Barn is a great catalyst for that.”

During one visit, there was a “very tough, very hard” gang member who stood silent while hearing the story of a horse that had suffered repeated beatings, says Mr. McCollister. It was later learned that the youth’s arms had been broken repeatedly by his father while growing up.

“The young man in question was later spotted in the back of the stable crying and softly petting the horse on the head, and saying over and over, ‘No one is going to hurt you now.’”

Mr. McCollister emphasizes that a visit to the Gentle Barn “can blow a kid’s mind, show them compassion and empathy and, best of all, let them know that their story isn’t fully written. They can still change and lead a happy, meaningful life.”

According to Mr. Weiner, it takes about \$50,000 a month to operate the Gentle Barn. Financing comes from individual donations, through the Web site, private family donations, corporate grants and foundations. Major donors include Ellen DeGeneres, Toyota, CBS, William Morris Endeavor and Princess Cruises.

In addition, the Gentle Barn is developing a reality television show with Ms. DeGeneres. Ms. Weiner says her goal is “to see a Gentle Barn in every major city around the world.” She adds, “I would love to give people a chance to hug a cow, give a pig a tummy rub, snuggle with a turkey and see that we are really all the same. Every day I do this work, I get to witness a miracle.”

Nurturing, the Animal-Human Connection

Participants from Huntley High School decided they wanted to focus on the idea of nurturing for a session. Ideas were shared about many different ways to nurture and how it can be demonstrated at school, home, in the community and with animals. The group conducted an experiment with the small animal herd to see what sort of nurturing each animal liked, or if accepting affection or nurturing was difficult for certain animals. Even though it was still a breakfast buffet for the animals (a.k.a. group hay feeding) most of the animals opted to spend time interacting with participants.

Caramel was especially affectionate, rubbing his little goat head on various knees. Even Nellie, (the very little mule with the very big trust issues) made several passes through the group to see what was going on. Toto eventually left his breakfast to investigate the activity and clearly wanted to be groomed; he even selected several grooming tools out of the bucket, holding a pink brush in his mouth as if to say, “Pick this one!”

When we reflected on all that we had experienced with the herd it was interesting to hear what sort of interactions each participant had, all seemed to be meaningful. We talked about how each of them could practice what they experienced when they went back to school, or later at home with their families. One participant mentioned that she experiences nurturing everyday when she gets home from school. After she carefully washes the “school germs” off her hands she sits on the floor with her cat and tells the cat about her day. She appreciates how the cat always waits for her to come home and listens to her even if she’s had a bad day. She nurtures the cat and the cat nurtures her~ In her words, “why else would the cat choose to sit and listen every single day?” “We help each other!”



“Paint your pony” Exercise
Comparing emotions and their
opposites through painted symbols



"Under the Stars"



Light Center Annual Event ~ Sept 17
Hosted by the generosity of John Cederlund



The tables adorned with TLC garden bounty



Guests begin to arrive



Hors d'oeuvres are ready!



Flowers everywhere



Director Jan greeting Friend, Kathy Hosty



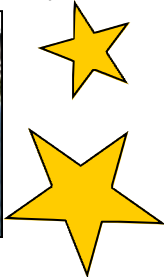
The tent is ready as guests socialize before the entertainment



John yucks it up with Sheriff and Marge Nygren



Supporters Steve Wallace,



L to R Boardmembers and staff Noreen Garmisch, Brian Huckstadt, Shawn Stahmer, Roberto Costillo, Carla Kaizen, Lisa Habbly, Jan Cederlund and volunteer Jean Horlock



Jan speaks about the importance of the Light Center mission



...while John speaks about the importance of giving back!



The Silent Auction is ready to roll!

Lisa and Lisa display the program



Bounty from the organic garden to sell and admire!



Our entertainment Show & Trick riding by mother and daughter team Jenny and Bev Vlahos



Selling the Balloon Raffle~ Board member Shawn Stahmer takes half the room while staffer Noreen Garmisch takes the other

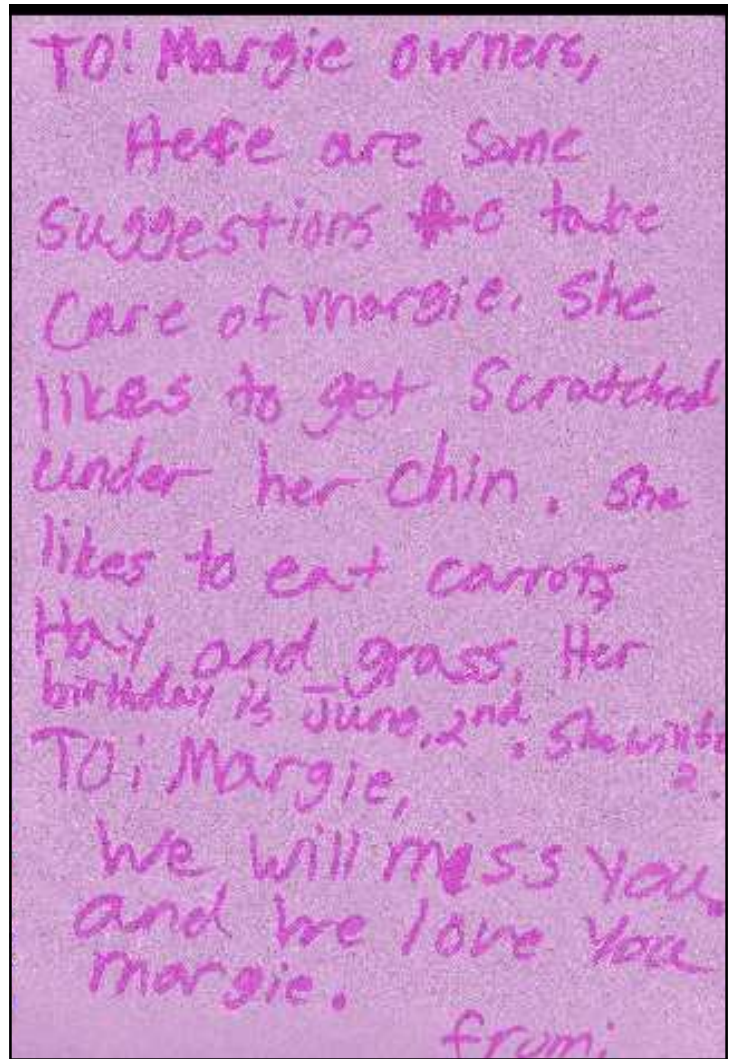


At nightfall, we are truly "Under the Stars"



TLC participants appreciate the animals!
 Here's a few of their observant descriptions
 by animal name~

- Blondie is pretty, awesome, small, cute, nice, has pretty fur, & the fluffiest pony ever.
 - Daisy is cute
 - Thomas is super cute
 - Babs is warm (as in body heat)
 - Caramel is loveable, a good goat, & the cutest
 - Toto is shy but cute, cool, really nice and gentle, "I love him", named from the yellow brick road
 - Nellie is adorable & cute
 - Storm is the "awesomest" horse ever
 - Rosie is cute, so cute, awesome, & beautiful
 - Muffy is a cute chick
 - Lady Gaga is unique, crazy, funny, nice hair, "love those feathers!" & has a hat on her head
 - Angel is a favorite & cute
 - Mario is a bunny buddy, "dig'n the mustache"
 - Leo is fuzzy & really cute
 - Cody is fluffy
 - Fiona is cute & really friendly
 - Belle is so cute, adorable, soft, & chubby but cute
 - Smudge is adventurous, friendly, a good hunting cat, & so fast they should've named him "Speedy"
 - Bob is a good worker with a common name.
- ...And did we mention their all cute!?!?!? :)



Hellos and Goodbyes It seems like only yesterday the Light Center was welcoming baby Margie the cow to the fold. Ahhh, how cute she *was*! But just as all babies, Margie soon grew up. At about 800 lbs, Margie soon learned how to push her weight around; romping and bucking playfully with her less than enthusiastic caretakers and stall mates. Ohhh, now she was a handful! Despite (untrue) threats to make her into hamburger, Margie continued to play her happy cow games with everyone at the farm. So weren't we the lucky ones to discover that the wonderful folks at Wedrose Acres in central Illinois were looking for a cow for their educational rescue farm! So off she went, on yet another cow adventure. Today, Wedrose is happy, the Light Center caretakers are happy, and most of all the other animals are happy. Somehow they just couldn't appreciate Margie's cow sense of humor! Isn't it amazing how things just work out sometimes! Bye, Margie! We love you!!!





The beauty of nature from different perspectives~



Hey Horse... Can you do this?



Training the trainers; Ok Corral and Greg Kersten- Spring '11

Help support our work with a Light Center Animal Sponsorship!



Your support helps the animals who help the kids!

			
Platinum Pony Level	Silver Sheep Level	Gold Goat Level	Bronze Bunny Level

Goat	\$100.00	\$75.00	\$50.00	\$25.00
GuineaPig	\$75.00	\$50.00	\$35.00	\$25.00
Sheep	\$150.00	\$100.00	\$75.00	\$25.00
Horse	\$1,800.00	\$1,000.00	\$500.00	\$100.00
Bunnies	\$75.00	\$50.00	\$35.00	\$25.00
Miniature Horse	\$800.00	\$400.00	\$100.00	\$25.00
Chickens	\$75.00	\$50.00	\$35.00	\$25.00
Donkey	\$1,100.00	\$500.00	\$100.00	\$25.00

Pick a friend, then pick a level~ It's just that easy!

Your sponsorship certificate will be mailed to you!

It's all about love!

Light Center Foundation is a proud affiliate agency of

United Way of Greater McHenry County



The Light Center Mission

"Nurturing through Nature"

Programming for challenged and at-risk youth through equine, animal-assisted, and nature oriented programming

TLC Officers & Board of Directors:

- Janet Cederlund, President & Exec Director
- Brian Huckstadt, Chairman
- Shawn Stahmer, Vice-Chair / Recording Sec.
- John Cederlund, Treasurer
- Roberto Costillo, Board Member
- Carla Kaizen, Associate Director and Program Liaison to Board