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Bowie family runs facility for mistreated animals at local farm

By MIMI RAUCK Staff Writer

When Percy's owner found him at the animal shelter, it was not a joyful reunion between a man and his dog.

The owner turned around and left after he saw the condition of his badly injured 2-year-old miniature pinscher, abandoning the dog at the shelter.

Brought in after being struck by a car somewhere in Prince George's County, the dog was suffering from a pulverized right ankle, badly broken left leg and a dislocated hip.

Percy's injuries were so serious and so costly to treat that he most likely would have been euthanized were it not for 30-year-old Tara Guevara, of Bowie, who rescued him from the shelter Sept. 26.

"Obviously, most shelters are underfunded and they weren't going to perform surgery on him," Guevara said.

A volunteer for a miniature pinscher aid group, Guevara did not hesitate when she got a call about the miniature pinscher in the shelter despite her father's pleas for "no more dogs."

She had taken in a number of miniature pinschers before, getting them ready for new adoptive homes. She had even permanently adopted "Luke," another "minpin" who had also been hit by a car.

But she had never been asked to care for a dog with injuries as severe as Percy's.

A lifelong animal lover, Guevara, along with her family, runs Hidden Haven Farm Equine Sanctuary and Education Center on Hillmeade Road.

The four-acre farm, with its 106-year-old converted farmhouse and distinctive purple barn, is a rare oasis amidst the rapidly encroaching subdivisions springing up nearby.

Running the farm is a family affair.

Guevara and her husband, Roger, their two sons, Joshua and Leo, and Guevara's parents, Barbara and Philip Wahle, all live there and help care for the animals - a 365-day-a-year job.

Guevara's family took in their first horse in 1991 after seeing a news report about a number of mistreated horses that were seized in Stafford County, Va.

They rented space in Adelphi for the horses before they bought the property on Hillmeade Road in 2001, which allowed them to provide a home for more unwanted horses.

Now they have 12 horses that were suffering from abuse or neglect or were unwanted by their owners.

With the help of volunteers, Guevara and her family care for and rehabilitate the animals.

They make ends meet by offering riding lessons and from money out of their own pockets.

Guevara got involved with miniature pinschers after looking into getting her own dog.

She eventually fell into volunteering with the Internet Miniature Pinscher Service.

"Little did I know the craziness that would ensue," Guevara said with a laugh.

Guevara learned that Percy would require at least two surgeries to repair the damage and costly heartworm treatment.

She was referred to Dr. Scott Andersen of Waugh Chapel Animal Hospital who agreed to go forward with Percy's care before Guevara had found the money to pay for it.

Andersen also neutered Percy for free, Guevara said.

The veterinarian also agreed to cap the funds for the two surgeries he needed to repair his broken bones at \$2,500. The heartworm treatment runs an additional \$450.

The frail little dog, underweight after the pain of his injuries and the two surgeries, now gamely hobbles around the family's property despite a heavy leg cast.

Percy shivers so much, Guevara said, that her mother got him a tiny little sweater to keep him warm, which the stubborn pup, of course, refuses to wear.

Guevara has documented Percy's rehabilitation on their Web site (www.bigpurplebarnbowie.org), describing the struggle to

get Percy to eat (tempting him with the occasional Chick-fil-A chicken nugget) and her daily efforts to keep the dog as comfortable as possible.

"He's been quite the little trooper," Guevara said. "He's really thin. He's just starting to eat. When you're in pain you don't want to eat."

The veterinarian has given Percy an excellent prognosis, Guevara said, although he may develop arthritis earlier than other dogs because of his injuries.

She said the miniature pinscher, often called "king of the toys" because they are so strong-willed, are not the dog for everyone. They need to be placed in homes with owners who are willing to provide the right training and environment. The dogs also tend to form strong bonds with one person, she said.

"It's going to be hard to give him up. If I don't find the perfect family, I won't give him up," she said.

But with another miniature pinscher at home and 12 horses to care for, she's got a lot on her plate already.

Guevara is trying to raise funds to pay for Percy's expenses and to defray the cost of his eventual adoption.

Typically, the costs of a dog's care are passed on to the new owner, but she said, no owner could afford to pay \$3,500 in fees to adopt a rescued dog.

Guevara is selling tickets for a number of raffles and she is in the process of planning an event to raise money to offset the costs.

For information on Hidden Haven Farm or to help Percy, visit www.bigpurplebarnbowie.org or call 301-674-3155.

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