

DONKEY LOVE

By Andi Christine Bednarzig

“I fell in love,” Annick Rousseau said, as she recalled the day, she acquired her first donkey.

Rousseau sat in her kitchen overlooking 25 acres of pastureland just outside Lyndhurst, a small agricultural community north of Gananoque. This former iron works town is most famous for its Annual Turkey Fair, celebrated on the third Saturday of September.

Rousseau’s passion for donkeys had its origins in the Eastern Township region of Quebec, where she had a farm of 200 sheep. She bought a donkey to protect her flock, and soon added a second one. Rousseau traveled to France to spend an intensive 10 days training to learn as much as she could about these amazing creatures.

When Rousseau developed skin irritations, and with her daughter allergic to cleaning products, a friend in Italy recommended donkey milk products; hence the creation of her handcrafted soaps.

Rousseau explained that donkey milk is closest to human milk in composition. It is often given to babies allergic to human milk. Consumption of raw donkey milk is often recommended for cancer patients in European countries, such as Belgium and Germany. It is believed that the milk will increase the level of leukocytes in the blood and help boost the immune system.

Two and a half years ago, Rousseau and her partner, Jean-Sebastien Gagné, decided to move their operation to Leeds and the Thousand Islands. They now co-exist with two jacks (males) and six jennies (females).

Rousseau runs a small shop out of her home and is also a regular at summer farmers’ markets. Her skin soothing, unscented soaps can be purchased locally in Lyndhurst at Wendy’s Country Market and The Green Gecko. In Gananoque, they can be found at Farmhouse Flowers.

Aside from making soap products, two years ago, Gagné and Rousseau planted 220 elderberry bushes, an indigenous Canadian plant with medicinal properties.

The couple is interested in the health benefits of the flowers, fruit, stems, and leaves. It will take about five years for the plantings to come to full fruition. With her knowledge and experience, Rousseau offers workshops for owners whose donkeys may be having temperament issues.

Rousseau is also interested in the therapeutic and mental health benefits of working with donkeys. She has helped handicapped adults and children, as well as autistic children in Quebec and hopes to continue this work.

“Seated in a wheelchair brings you to eye level with a donkey, a perfect height for grooming and brushing.” Rousseau recalls how some of her donkeys figured out to gently manoeuvre wheelchairs, to the delight of participants in her program.

Donkeys have delighted attendees at the Annual Lyndhurst Santa Claus Parade. On Valentines Day, warm, wet smooches are given at a “kissing booth.”

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Rousseau described the loyalty of donkeys; She was bringing a wheelbarrow of manure out of the barn, when she slipped and fell and hurt her head. “I woke up to breathing on my head and felt something pushing my shoulder to wake me up.” One of her donkeys had broken through a fence and injured itself to get to her. “Donkeys are close to the family, much like dogs and are very protective and loyal,” Rousseau said, as she stroked her donkey’s long soft ears. “Owning a donkey is a very humbling experience.” LH



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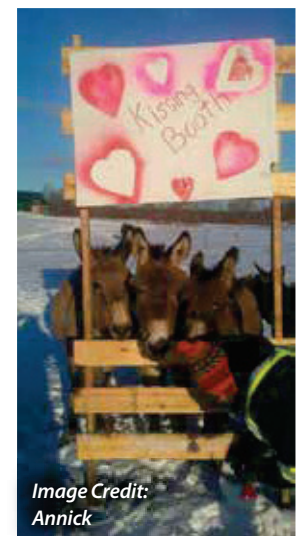


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