

# A sanctuary seeks support

After having to close the gates to public tours, the Shy Wolf Sanctuary Education and Experience Center needs help to relocate and resume its mission.



When inspired by a howl from Deanna Deppen, vice president of Shy Wolf Sanctuary Education and Experience Center, many of the residents howl right along with her.

Photo by Shellie Terry Benson

By Shellie Terry Benson  
Editor

Nancy Smith is talking about purpose. Her purpose, her organization's purpose and the purpose she gives to the animals that surround her. As the president of the Shy Wolf Sanctuary Education and Experience Center in east Naples, her calling is to take in exotic animals found throughout Southwest Florida and rehabilitate them back to health.

"It's when something makes you feel good inside ... arranging flowers ... helping the elderly ... whatever it is, everyone needs a purpose," she says. "We all have one, but sometimes it's hard to figure out what it is."

In 2012, Smith ran into some roadblocks in pursuing her own purpose. An anonymous complaint to code enforcement resulted in the sanctuary having to discontinue tours of its 2.5-acre sanctuary to the public. The land is zoned as residential and there were other coding and licensing issues.

With 50 animals to care for and facilities to keep up, the purpose of the tours was the fund the operations of the 20-year-old organization — to the tune of \$120,000 a year.

So the sanctuary is looking to move to a much larger space six miles away in North Belle Meade, which is zoned as agricultural and will allow more room for the animals to roam.

The land came as a donation, but moving the entire operation will cost the group about \$5 million, says Sanctuary Vice President Deanna Deppen.

"We're already working to get on the property," Deppen says. "We had planned on about three years, but with the gates being closed, we need to come up with other funding sources. It's more urgent for us to educate people to be able to get to a place to do that."

Walking through the grounds of the current sanctuary, a visitor quickly learns that not only are there a wide variety of unusual animals there, but that they are all extremely well cared for. Their eyes shine as they make eye contact, their coats are thick and healthy, and most of them are in action, unless they are the nocturnal variety. A few are a bit unsocial, but have good excuses.

And Smith is like a doting mother to each and every one of them, regardless of their strange smells, messy behavior or cranky attitudes.

"She likes older men," Smith says of one of the wolves. "Her house is always different every day; she's very productive," she says of an industrious prairie

dog. "If he would not have wanted to come in, he would have dug his feet in," she comments about a sociable wolf that lets people pet him as they would a dog.

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— Nancy Smith, president,  
Shy Wolf Sanctuary

Smith and her group have rescued animals from other floundering shelters, from abuse, from bored owners and from the dangers of the wild — both natural and manmade.

"People see a little animal with fleas all over it, and they take it to a rehabilitation place," Smith explains. "Then the rehab place makes everything OK for the animal, but the problem is, there's nowhere to put them. It's illegal to put them back into the wild once you've rehabbed them."

And that's where the sanctuary's purpose comes in. "The animals stay for the remainder of their lives," Smith says. "They never have to worry about being hungry, being thirsty or being lonely ever again."

To keep up the operating costs, the sanctuary is trying to enlist 2,000 people to commit to a \$5 donation each month, or more if possible. To learn more, visit [ShyWolfSanctuary.com](http://ShyWolfSanctuary.com).



Glory is a mixed breed cat who is extremely curious about visitors who come by her home. She purrs loudly at anyone who stops to say hello.

Photo by Shellie Terry Benson

## Help

From feeding and cleaning up after the animals to maintaining the grounds, there are plenty of ways to assist the Shy Wolf Sanctuary.

The sanctuary is a non-profit facility that relies heavily on community members who volunteer their time and affection for the animals. Boy Scout troupes have helped with plantings and some residents complete their community service by helping on the grounds. The group could use equipment and services for the animals, as well. Through the sanctuary's website, animal sponsorships are available, as are calendars and links to PayPal for direct contributions.

## MUCH MORE THAN WOLVES

While the different breeds of wolves take up the most room at the Shy Wolf Sanctuary, they are only part of the population. Nancy Smith and her crew take in a wide variety of exotic animals. There's a fluffy arctic fox, a crab-eating fox, a silver-tipped red fox and a tiny Fennec fox, along with several prairie dogs and turtles. Smith even has sugar gliders that live in the house. Outside, there are a few big cats that look ferocious, but purr like happy kittens. There are a handful of animals that are available to be adopted, such as wolfdogs like Amaya and Chief. Those who wish to adopt must fill out an application, have home-ownership verification or landlord approval, plus reference checks will be completed as well as home visits to ensure the animal is a good fit for the family. To learn more, check out the adoptable pets at [ShyWolfSanctuary.com](http://ShyWolfSanctuary.com).



Nancy Smith gets a little love from Tien, who has lived at the sanctuary since he was three weeks old.

Photo by Shellie Terry Benson