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# A paradise for pigs

'Heaven on earth' is a real place for pigs at the Sanctuary

BY CHRISTELLE L. DEL PRETE



**F Y I**  
 About 25 pigs call Marshall's Piggy Paradise home at any one time.

Nestled into the lower part of majestic Angel Canyon, Marshall's Piggy Paradise is heaven on earth for the Sanctuary's pigs. Potbellied pigs are intelligent, clean and adorable, and they can make wonderful pets. But sometimes they lose their homes because local zoning laws prohibit them, or because pigs advertised by breeders as "teacup" or "mini" pigs grow much larger than expected.

Whatever the reason they come to Best Friends, the Sanctuary's pigs all have one thing in common: Here, they are loved and assured the best care possible. They get medical attention, a high-quality diet and assistance overcoming any behavioral challenges they may have, not to mention plenty of enrichment to keep life fun. Best of all, they get to make friends with other pigs, and as social animals, they love it.

**Group living for piggies**

In Marshall's Piggy Paradise, pigs live in groups. Community is crucial to their happiness and well-being, and it can help them form better relationships with people, too. "In my experience, when pigs don't have the opportunity to socialize and interact with other pigs, they can start to have problems with people," says Jen Reid, manager of Horse Haven and Marshall's Piggy Paradise.

Not all pigs make perfect roommates; it takes time and effort to put together well-



matched groups that can coexist peacefully and happily. To that end, there's a "retirement community," for older pigs and those with special physical needs, and a "piggy park," a piglet-proof area that often houses a younger, smaller group. In the "green collar" area (a reference to the same collar-coding system used in Dogtown), friendly, easygoing pigs interact with volunteers and other visitors. Pigs who need extra one-on-one attention and socialization — but also a



**F Y I**

In an average week, Marshall's Piggy Paradise will go through four cases of romaine lettuce (24 heads per case), five 30-pound boxes of frozen veggie mix, and assorted fresh fruits or veggies in season.



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All of our pigs are spayed or neutered.



**VOLUNTEER (AND INTERN) LOVE**

► **Joy Self**

**LAS VEGAS, NEVADA**

Marshall's Piggy Paradise is my downtime happy place, and I love it. Pigs are so unique. A lot of people discount them as being not very smart, but they are. They know you will follow them during their walks and if they roll over for belly rubs, they know you will come to them.

► **Leslie Biesiadecki**

**DALLAS, TEXAS**

Volunteering with the pigs is a very unique and fun experience. This is my 12th year volunteering and my 15th or 16th visit to the Sanctuary. I've learned so much about potbellied pigs, and I've taken that education away and shared it with other people. I had one little guy following me around while I was filling up water buckets, and he would nuzzle me and flop over for belly rubs. I think everyone who comes here for the full Sanctuary experience should do a shift with pigs.

► **Natalie Lehman**

**BULLHEAD CITY, ARIZONA**

As a five-week intern, I worked with pigs Smitty and Cami. Smitty is very protective of Cami and not super-accepting of human affection. His caregiver, Rosalie, had me use the "carrot stick" training tool. I let him sniff it, then I kept on petting him and petting him with it, and he looked like he was going to flop over. When he finally did, I was able to pet him. It was a really profound moment for me. When pigs let go and learn to trust you, their personalities come out. I'm thrilled to have had this opportunity, and I can't wait to go back to work with them again.



**F Y I**  
 Our piggies receive annual “spa days,” which include hoof trims, blood work, dental care and a general wellness check. Some of the older or special-needs pigs may receive two or more spa days per year if needed.



dation of that diet, the pellets are supplemented with a variety of fresh veggies, such as romaine lettuce, peas, carrots, lima beans and green beans, and seasonal snacks, such as watermelon, zucchini and pumpkin. Fig cookies are the treats of choice, along with dried fruit and almonds. Coconut oil, another delicacy, helps keep the pigs’ skin healthy.

A small on-site clinic provides routine dental care, hoof care and wellness checks. Pigs who need critical care or surgery go to the Best Friends Animal Clinic, a short ride up the canyon.

**People to see, things to do**

When you’re a pig in Marshall’s Piggy Paradise, there are always plenty of people to see and things to do. There’s lots of room to root around in the dirt, and when the weather is warm, the pigs can take a luxurious mud bath or go on a stroll with caregivers and volunteers. Many Sanctuary volunteers love socializing with the pigs to help them get ready for forever homes.

The entertainment options are nearly endless. Food puzzles are popular here, as are a variety of fun and games. Best Friends trainers and caregivers use Parelli Natural Horsemanship (a training method that’s commonly used with horses, but certainly isn’t relegated to them) and lots of positive reinforcement (think fig treats) to teach the pigs fun sports like agility, as well as useful life skills, such as how to go into a kennel comfortably or walk up a ramp into a vehicle.

Sometimes, caregivers and volunteers just sit quietly with the pigs, brushing them and rubbing their bellies. When it comes down to it, the most important thing at Marshall’s Piggy Paradise is giving the pigs all the love and attention they deserve for as long as it takes for them to find loving homes of their own. ■



**F Y I**  
 Ninety-five pigs have been placed in loving homes since 2002.

little more space and less foot traffic — live in the “social butterfly” area. Finally, there’s Holly’s pasture, also affectionately called the rumpus room, where higher-energy pigs (including one named Holly) reside.

**TLC for all**

No matter which group they fit into, all of the pigs have access to cozy houses that keep them dry and comfortable in every season. Some houses have heat and air-conditioning, while others are packed full of hay for the pigs to nest in.

To eat like a pig in Marshall’s Piggy Paradise is to eat a low-sugar, high-fiber diet. While high-quality pellets are a four-

