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Linda Hornsby
& Marianne Guerra

Sharing Their Passion
For Animals Through The
BallenIsles Wildlife Foundation

INSIDE:

Business Profile
Air Pro Services
pg 13

Business Profile
Flower Kingdom
pg 19





cover story **LINDA HORNSBY & MARIANNE GUERRA**

Sharing Their Passion For Animals Through The Ballensles Wildlife Foundation

Ballensles boasts a lush natural habitat with wildlife that often mingles with the neighborhood's residents. A new foundation has been established to educate the community about this wildlife and also offer protection to its animals. The Ballensles Wildlife Foundation came to be about a year and a half ago and is headed by its president, Marianne Guerra, and its vice president, Linda Hornsby.

Marianne Guerra, originally from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, has always had a strong love for animals. "I would bring home every stray. My parents

loved animals, but my mother was a clean freak and didn't want the responsibility. The strays would go to a "farm" when I went to school," Marianne reminisced. She attended the University of Maryland, and the first thing on her agenda after school was adopting a pet of her own. She eventually ended up with both dogs and cats.

"We came to Ballensles with our animals in tow about 11 years ago because my husband was unhappy with the winters in Maryland," said Marianne. "We were living on

the eastern shore of Maryland on Chesapeake Bay, which is beautiful but much more livable in the summers than the winters. He's also a golfer and was interested in being able to play golf year round. When we drove through the gates of Ballensles, the beauty just astonished us."

Linda was born in New York and moved to Miami after graduating from high school. Shortly after her move to Miami, she attended Florida International University where she ultimately became an adjunct professor for their Legal Studies Program. She

also became the Regional Manager for the Miami office of a legal search and recruitment firm, The Wallace Registry, which has since been bought out by Kelly Services.

"My husband and I moved up here 16 years ago. We had just gotten married and built our first home together. We fell in love with BallenIsles." They moved with their two dogs, one from an animal shelter and the other rescued from living on the streets. "I always, always loved dogs. When I moved here, I got involved with the founder of the Big Dog Ranch Rescue, Judi Stiff, and did fundraising and volunteer work for them. My passion for animals became more and more intense. Four years ago, I was asked to help kick off the inaugural year of the BallenIsles Charities Foundation."

In late 2013, I met Marianne and a couple of the other women who had

recently established an organization for animals here at BallenIsles. Actually, they had taken over an organization that Mona Roberts had started to care for the feral cats within the gates of BallenIsles. Mona had been doing that single-handedly and almost entirely at her own expense and was ready to "retire." She asked Marianne and some of the others to take it over. They agreed but decided to expand the mission to include all of the wildlife we have here. It was during the early days that one of the women involved asked me if I wanted to join. Having loved animals all of my life, joining them was a no brainer! At that juncture, I was wearing two hats: Events Chair for the BallenIsles Charities Foundation, which was my priority, and board member of the BallenIsles Wildlife Foundation. However, after three full years of service to the Charities Foundation, I felt it was

time for me to step down to allow new people and ideas to take the Charities Foundation further."

The BallenIsles Wildlife Foundation (BIWF) is still committed to the feral cat population, following all of the Trap, Neuter, and Return (TNR) guidelines. They humanely trap the cats and take them to their vet for a health check, which includes blood work, neutering, inoculations, notching of the left ear (the international sign of a TNR cat), and any required medication (such as deworming and flea treatment), and they are micro-chipped. In addition to their commitment to TNR, BIWF helps all the BallenIsles wildlife by working with the community's security team to rescue any type of injured animal and get it the medical care it requires, almost exclusively at Busch Wildlife Sanctuary.

"We have seven wonderful, active

Continued page 10

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board members and about 20 devoted committee members, all of whom are residents," said Marianne.

Another way BIWF helps the wildlife is by publishing a monthly magazine, Nature Matters, that is mailed to every address in BallenIsles. "The magazine has brought us so much attention and compliments," said Marianne. "We found out by chance that a young man and his wife were starting a new business publishing neighborhood magazines. My career was as an editor for the American Journal of Psychiatry, so it was a "natural" thing for me to do. Since the magazine's inception, many like-minded residents have offered to contribute articles and to help in various other ways. It is very heart-warming."

BWIF has also spent their time engaging and working with the BallenIsles Community Association as well as other wildlife and animal-related organizations. One of their

most important connections, the Busch Wildlife Sanctuary, aides BIWF by helping injured and in-need wildlife. Other connections include Arthur R. Marshall Foundation, Pet Haven Rescue, Susan Hargreaves' Animal Hero Kids, and MacArthur Beach State Park. These organizations also provide content and articles for Nature Matters. Busch Wildlife trained the director of security and several board members on how to safely capture injured animals.

"Our rescue committee has saved a lot of animals this year," said Linda. "Many were hit by cars; before BIWF, people didn't know what to do. Now they're calling us. We've worked with BallenIsles Security to implement, community-wide, a pet registration form. It's optional, but it's for everyone's benefit. We've had several situations where pets have gotten loose, and if they're micro-chipped and/or registered, it takes a lot less time

for security to reunite the pet with its owner. We provide micro-chips at no cost to residents who submit a pet registration form and want to chip their animals,"

The BallenIsles Wildlife Foundation has accomplished a great deal in the short time that it has existed. What brings Marianne and Linda the most joy is knowing that they are making a difference in the lives of the animal and human residents of Ballelsles and spreading knowledge and awareness in their community.

"Our passion is the welfare of all animals," said Marianne.

"All of this is a labor of love." Linda added, "We are a voice for the voiceless. Our mission is all about educating our residents and protecting the animals in our community. We're all working together. It's been very rewarding." ■

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