



CHAD ROBERTSON/SUN MEDIA

Joyce Smith worries about the fate of her animal shelter now that she is getting older and fears the owners of the land on which the shelter stands may ask for it back.

A cat lady's 'nightmare'

Fears her animal sanctuary is in jeopardy

KATHYN COHLMAN
Sun Media

Joyce Smith is worried the hundreds of animals she has rescued may lose their Second Chance at a decent life.

"It's a nightmare of mine. I think about it every night," she said.

Smith, 78, is desperate to ensure her north Pickering animal shelter will continue to operate should anything happen to her.

She has run the Second Chance Animal Sanctuary since 1986 on property lent to her from neighboring Gleny Downs Golf and Country Club.

Although the golf course has made no move to renounce its generosity, Smith fears that "sooner or later they're going to want to use their land."

"Even staying here ... nobody will take this mess over," she said.

Smith works 16 to 20 hours a day caring for about 300 cats, as well as an assortment that includes parrots, guinea

chickens, ducks, rabbits and guinea pigs. All of the animals are strays or abandoned.

"After saving animals all my life, I would hate to think they'd all be put down," she said.

Smith has been caring for pets since she was a child when she would keep strays in a box behind her mother's wood stove. Once her children grew up and moved away, she cashed in her RRSPs to fund Second Chance.

Stray kittens

Kathryn Threlkeld, 22, visited the sanctuary in the summer to seek advice after adopting four stray kittens and was moved by Smith's attention.

"She's got a big heart. I was very charmed by her," Threlkeld said. "The place she got was a small, rundown — you can't even call it a house — and she sleeps on the couch."

When Smith isn't having nightmares about the future, she dreams of the ideal shelter.

"I'm sure I could build a beautiful sanctuary if I had the time and the money," she said.

Many of the animals at Second Chance are lodged in cages outside on a separate building — but 100 of the cats stay in Smith's home.

"I have a house and I'm not sure if I live here or the cats live here and they let me stay," she said.

Smith is appealing for a donation of land or real estate to rebuild the shelter, which will be especially crucial once she can no longer care for it.

"We need a new location — one that I can own, that I can leave in trust for the animals," she said. "So it wouldn't be hard to have people come in and look after them."

Right now it's "too big a headache. What do you do with 500 animals?"

Second Chance will host its annual fundraising Valentine's dance in February. For more information or to make a donation, contact Smith at 905-649-8282.



Her pet project

SE 12 Senior worries about future of her animal shelter