

The Story of WRCNU

"It's a long road ahead and a long one behind"

DaLyn Erickson-Marthaler, Wildlife Specialist and Executive Director, is the core of the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center of Northern Utah (WRCNU), the catalyst that motivates a group of energetic and passionate wildlife volunteers to sacrifice for a mission and vision they all believe to be extremely important.



DaLyn was born with the “hands of an angel” and has worked in the “animal business” for more than 35 years. DaLyn started out as a young girl caring for injured and orphaned birds, bunnies, etc. ... hiding them in a box under her bed. **Special note: back when DaLyn was a child it was not illegal for the public to take in wild animals—today it requires both state and federal permits to do this; no exceptions.** Her first pet bird was a parakeet she bought, saving it from a young boy who was allowed to mistreat it. Her love of parakeets persists to this day because of that first rescued bird. DaLyn started breeding cockatoos and other birds early on, but realization of what the breeding business is all about quickly became apparent. It was no longer the fun and romantic endeavor she had envisioned. Breeder birds are not pets (they need isolation to breed) and there are more birds needing good homes than there are good homes for all the birds bred for captivity. It turned out that breeding birds for profit was not in her heart.

Instead of breeding, DaLyn realized that education and training of birds, their owners and potential owners was badly needed; training people about the investment and responsibility of keeping birds as forever pets. She made the transition from breeding, to teaching behavior modification to owners and their pets.

In 2001, DaLyn took on a part-time job at a local conservation education center and eventually transitioned to the position of the Director of Raptor Care. The Executive Director mentioned in passing that they also had the proper state and federal licenses for their current bird rehabilitation program. DaLyn picked up on rehabilitation very quickly. Adapting knowledge gleaned from parrot breeding, she successfully raised wild hatchlings that were previously thought by the staff “to be impossible to hand-rear”. In 2003, DaLyn started working in rehabilitation and raptor care as a full-time position. She was mostly self-taught: she joined NWRA and IWRC, built an extensive library, networked with other licensed rehabilitators, and modified/expanded her knowledge to relate to wild birds. She learned some raptor handling techniques from another rehabber as well as a falconer friend. With this new knowledge, she managed to train the resident “Ambassador” birds that had previously only been used for display. She soon had several Education Ambassadors ready to travel to programs and give public performances. Even with the meager allowance given to cover the costs of operating, DaLyn quickly grew a credible program respected by her peers, the local Department of Wildlife Resources and USFWS.



She worked out of a 300 square foot shack with a roof that leaked, no running water, inadequate cooling in the hot summer months and the only heat during the winter months from a small space heater, but DaLyn continued to improve on this underfunded program. She wasn't going to get rich in this field of work, but she worked 7 days a week, 365 days a year, ensuring the health and care of resident Ambassadors and the wild rehab patients.

During the summer months in what DaLyn dubbed “Baby Bird Season”, she would average no less than 14 hour days. On occasion, she would arrive before 9:00 AM and not leave until 3:00 AM the next morning. Her dedication, passion and compassion seemed a bottomless well. The only “vacation time” she allowed herself was a couple of hospital stays due to severe issues with her health, but as the only paid employee for this position there was no one

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else to turn to in order to relieve the long days. Her “staff” was made up of an all-volunteer force of dedicated and passionate animal lovers; no one had the knowledge or expertise to take on the work she did; most had jobs and families to attend. DaLyn knew that if she took a day off for any reason—ill health or just to relax or take care of personal business—that the patients would very likely suffer or even die and she would not allow that to happen.

A couple bright spots in DaLyn’s life include the day in 2007 when she was told of the plan to build a new Rehab facility and then again in April of the same year when she finally received running water—a small sink and a 4 gallon hot water heater in the tiny leaky shack. This last measure was intended to be a “stop-gap measure” to get the rehabilitation department through a period while it waited for the new facility to be funded and built—hope at last!

But, with the “ups”, came the “downs”... two years later, it became apparent the new facility would not be a reality and the Board of Directors voted to discontinue funding for the rehabilitation program. This seemed to leave DaLyn and her dedicated volunteers nowhere to go—at least not without a lot more work and sacrifice.

Work and sacrifice was nothing new to this team. The difference this time was that they were not just caring for sick, injured and orphaned birds, but now had to grow a new grassroots nonprofit organization from the ground up. They only had 5 months to make it work while still under the safety net of the Center’s “legal and financial umbrella.”

As Paul Harvey would say, *“And now for the rest of the story.”* Many angels were flying and fighting madly to save the only legally permitted wildlife rehabilitation effort in Northern Utah and success was the only option. Today, the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center of Northern Utah is proof of a community coming together, recognizing the NEED for this important service and showing that literally *“anything can happen if you set your mind to it”*.

WRCNU began the formidable process of obtaining its own State and Federal licensing for rehabilitation and education. This process included successfully passing a grueling test, documentation of apprenticeship, facility inspection and proof of the ability to care for all of the species that would be accepted. By “word of mouth” and local news articles, people stepped up with donations, suggestions, a facility, and other needed support. A large law firm volunteered to get WRCNU through the arduous legal process to their “nonprofitdom”; an anonymous Angel Donor payed for DaLyn’s wages for the next six months when finances were scarce; another Angel Donor (Kathryn Penrod, DVM) donated the temporary use of her old veterinary hospital while WRCNU waited for a more permanent facility; volunteers paid for equipment, food, utilities, and medical supplies “out-of-pocket”; Parrish Creek Veterinary Clinic provided free services; and probably the most perfect timing of all ... just as the current facility was sold ... the WRCNU Board of Directors, with help from a lawyer friend and supporter, successfully negotiated the Agreement to occupy the newly closed Ogden City Animal Shelter. In November 2010, WRCNU made the big move to their current facility.



As of this date, WRCNU has provided care to more than 18,300 wildlife patients thanks to our huge and growing community of supporters—we wouldn’t be here if not for those who stepped up in 2009 or those of you stepping up today and tomorrow to continue this most important endeavor—a community service “to right the wrongs”.

Without WRCNU taking in everything from hummingbirds to eagles and chipmunks to beaver, in quantities averaging more than 2,400 wild animals each year, most of these victims of human development would be euthanized or suffer lingering deaths with pain and starvation. THANK YOU ALL for your continued support of “DaLyn’s Dream”; WRCNU’s dream and mission: **EDUCATION, REHABILITATION and RELEASE!**

THANK YOU, TO OUR ANGELS, BIG AND SMALL; YOU ARE ALL AN INTEGRAL PART TO OUR CONTINUED SUCCESS!

“And now YOU know, the REST of the story.” ~Paul Harvey