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Tuesday, February 22, 2011

Misstep puts Andy in a tight spot

Team effort rescues animal



Andy, the pony, has been at the Shustak farm since May. (SUBMITTED PHOTO)

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HOLDEN — It's OK, Andy the Evil Pony was just fine yesterday.

At least it was a lot better day than Sunday.

Andy, who is 31 years old and blind in one eye, was just minding his own business while Christopher Shustak was preparing to milk Melissa the Jersey on his property on Bailey Road. But the white pony didn't count on the icy embankment next to the driveway and slid about 3 feet, hooves first, under a maroon F-150 truck parked there.

Andy got wedged under the truck and went into a panic, Mr. Shustak said. Mr. Shustak and his stepfather Fred Parker ran to calm Andy, whom they knew could seriously injure himself trying to kick his way out from the Ford.

The calm hands on Andy's neck and head and body did the trick. That's because of the trust that has built up since Mr. Shustak acquired the 400-pound pony last spring, when he didn't want to separate him from Linus, a Belgian draft horse who had long grazed with Andy.

The two-acre farm is home to rescued animals and pets, including two horses, two cows, a pony and a miniature horse. While Melissa is instrumental in providing Mr. Shustak, a computer network consultant, with milk and the basis for butter, yogurt, and cheese, the horses provide neighbors with manure that they frequently pick up from the property in a neighborhood where there used to be a lot more horses.

While Andy was reasonably calm, Mr. Shustak was thinking that it could be fatal if he did not get off his side soon. He called 911 about 10 a.m. and Patrolmen Michael Joslyn and Todd Ventres showed up "within a minute," Mr. Shustak said, and summoned the Fire Department — the rescue and another fire engine. Because they could not move Andy, they also called Village Repair, a local towing company, to move the truck.

Greg Barthelmes was answering a AAA call when he got the call from the police. Police calls take precedence so he immediately headed for Bailey Road.

Besides, Mr. Barthelmes said, "My wife owns two horses. I kind of had that feeling in my heart for horses. So I kind of wanted to get there and make sure we did the best we could for the horse."

Once he got there, he extended a boom and winched the truck 2-1/2 or 3 feet up off Andy and freed the pony in about 10 minutes, he said.

"It's definitely the weirdest phone call I've gotten" in the three years or so since he's been driving a tow truck for Village Repair, Mr. Barthelmes said, stranger even than the stolen golf cart he had to pull off the railroad tracks last year.

Once the truck was up and away, Andy waited for Mr. Shustak to signal him with a rope attached to a halter before he got up, Mr. Shustak said. He estimated the ordeal last 45 minutes.

At first "he was kind of sore and limping" with minor scrapes above his hoof and elsewhere, the owner said.

But within five minutes Andy was nibbling hay on the driveway. "Today he seems to be normal. He's doing great," Mr. Shustak said yesterday.

And, he confided, "Andy is just a sweetheart." He said most ponies are full of mischief and anyone who owns one would know where the moniker comes from, but he said that Andy has really not earned the "evil" title.

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