

## Critters delight city seniors

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Vinnie the pony and Mabel the dark pot-bellied pig are the new residents at a Castle Downs senior's home - and they know how to put on a show.

As they scuttled around inside a fenced area outside the Kipnes Centre for Veterans yesterday, residents giggled and smiled with glee.

"It's quite a sight to behold," said Jack McIntosh, 88, who moved to the residence in February. "It's a novelty and it makes people happy."

Hearts and Hooves, a non-profit organization that rescues and trains miniature animals for pet therapy, has loaned Vinnie and Mabel to the seniors home at 4470 McRae Ave. for the summer.

"We live in the city all the time and you don't see much of the wildlife and the rural areas," said Ginger Lane, 90, as she admired Mabel.

Continuing care centres in the city typically use domestic animals such as dogs, cats and rabbits, as a form of pet therapy.

"Pet therapy has a positive effect on the resident's physical, emotional and social interactions with others," said Bernadette DeSantis, spokesman for CapitalCare, which manages the residence.

"It reduces stress and helps residents have a more meaningful quality of life."

This is the second time that Hearts and Hooves have brought loaned animals to the residence.

Last year, the group brought two miniature horses.

"It's really calming for me to watch the horses," said Lane, who last year enjoyed watching the animals from her bedroom every day. "They don't hurry. They just take their time when they're walking around."

Michelle Kropp, founder and president of the animal rescue group, said a lot of the elders at the residence grew up on farms.

"It's just a creative approach to making life in the seniors facility more enjoyable."

The animals will likely stay there as late as November.

Once there's snow on the ground, they will be taken back by the rescue group - but they will come back to visit once a month in the winter.

About two dozen children from the YMCA child care centre housed at the seniors' home building also met the animals yesterday.