

Owl Returns to Good Shepherd

by Ann Harvey

It was a hot August morning when the kindergarten and first grade students went out for their early morning recess. It didn't take them long to see an amazing sight caught in the bottom of the soccer net ... lots of feathers, a beak ...

Kindergarten teacher Mrs. Podrebarac said, "Look what a big bird that is!"

First grade teacher Lorri Jackson knew better. "That's not just any bird, that's an owl! We'll need scissors to cut it out."

As the children were moved back to a safe distance, Mrs. Jackson put on the gloves all teachers keep for emergencies and waited for the scissors. The alarm was sent back inside to not let any more children onto the playground. Mrs. Podrebarac returned with the scissors and tried to calm the bird as Mrs. Jackson began to slowly cut away the net. "He was very tangled, but he knew we weren't going to hurt him and he lay very still, watching me."

Principal Barb Burgoon and staff member Anne Harvey came out to see if further assistance was needed. They came armed with towels to cover the bird if needed and a large box. They did not have much protection against the large claws of this predator.

Most importantly, someone had called Operation Wildlife. As they cut and slowly pulled the net away as gently as possible word came from inside that Operation Wildlife was on the way. Since Owls are nocturnal, this owl may have been there much of the night and was exhausted from fighting to free itself.

"The net was terribly tangled around him," said Mrs. Jackson. Once he was free of the net the owl continued to lie there, its wings splayed out at an awkward angle. The box was used to shield him from the hot sun. Everyone waited. The children, at a very respectful distance of at least 50 feet, waited in awed silence. After an eternity of several minutes the Operation Wildlife team arrived and gently put him into a cage. As he perked up and lifted his head all the children cheered. He was alive!

The great-horned owl was taken to the small Operation Wildlife receiving facility in the shopping center at Nieman and 75th street, and then on to the main rehab facility near Linwood.

Diane Johnson, director of the OWL told Mrs. Harvey, "This is a protected animal. Raptors are wild and they are certainly not pets. Because of that they are not allowed to have visitors. He does have a broken wing and we will be caring for him until he has healed. Then he will be returned to his home."

Most likely the great-horned owl lives in the heavily wooded area north of the playground. Perhaps those of you who live within a mile or so of the school will be outside some night in late autumn and will hear hooting or see the winged glory of this wild animal as he dives for mice. Think back on the morning that Mrs.

Jackson rescued him and give a little prayer of thanks that there are people like Operation Wildlife who can help injured wild animals so that they can continue to be part of the place where we live and worship.

Addendum

The owl was returned to Good Shepherd on the first day of fall. In front of 340 children she took flight and returned to her home. *-editor*