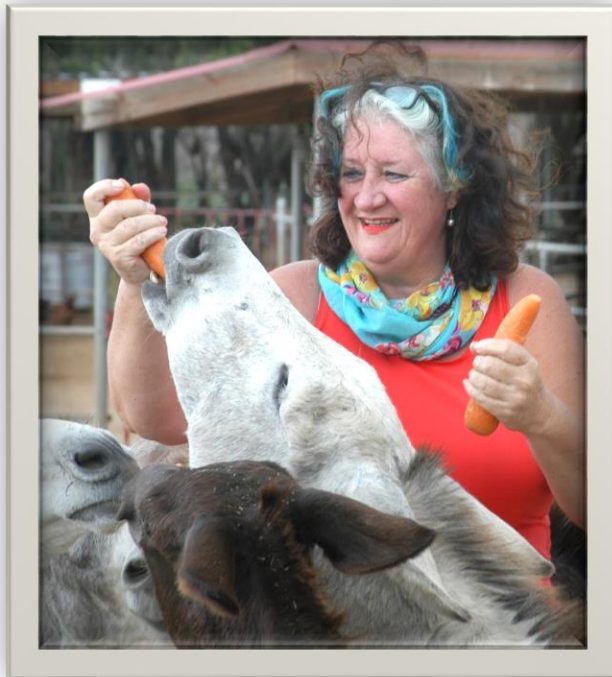




## August 2023 / Two Jubilees!!!!

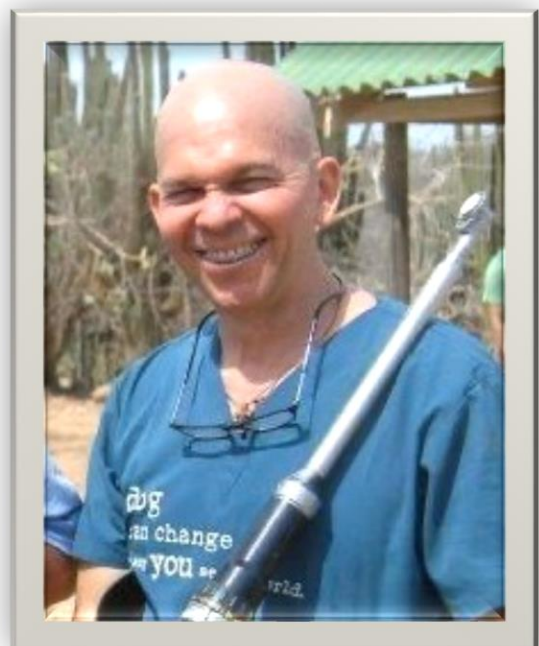


### Desiree

This month, we celebrate a joyous anniversary; our well-known jack-of-all-trades has been living among the quadrupeds for 25 years now. Indeed, Desiree Eldering is the longest-serving member within our foundation this August. She started as a volunteer on Sunday mornings back in 1998 and has since become a full-time force. We cannot imagine the Donkey Sanctuary without her, and luckily, we can continue to benefit from her presence, as she's still a youthful 62 years of age

### Ricardo

But Desiree isn't the only stalwart with an impressive track record. Our board member and veterinarian, Ricardo Contreras, has also been caring tirelessly for the donkeys for the past 25 years. Let's take a brief look back on their respective donkey careers.





Desiree began as a Sunday morning volunteer. At the age of 37, she encountered someone on the shores of Aruba who told her about the Donkey Sanctuary. Her curiosity was piqued, and after an initial visit, she signed up. Her interest in quadrupeds wasn't entirely new; she had been a "horse girl" in the Netherlands until the age of 20. However, life's responsibilities intervened and she built a successful career in the banking sector and even had her own flower shop.



Love, as often happens, disrupted her tranquility. She met her true love, Ken, in the Netherlands and moved with him to Curacao. There, she discovered a stray donkey with a rope around its neck, near her home. She provided the donkey with food and water, and the "donkey girl" was born.

Ricardo was born 59 years ago in Venezuela. Thanks to his Aruban mother, he visited Aruba regularly during his childhood.

While studying to become a veterinarian, he gained valuable experience on his father's farm in Venezuela. Eventually, he permanently moved to Aruba in 1991 and, alongside his sister Andreina, established a veterinary clinic. They were frequently called upon to care for sick donkeys or assist when accidents involved donkeys. During that time, most donkeys still roamed freely on the island, leading to frequent accidents. Some residents began taking in the donkeys and in 1997, the Donkey Sanctuary Aruba came into being, with Ricardo as a board member providing his expertise. Despite his greater familiarity with horses than donkeys when he arrived in Aruba, he quickly adapted and learned on the job.







Over the past 25 years, both have experienced a multitude of events, achieving numerous milestones.

The Donkey Sanctuary has grown from 20 to 127 donkeys. Most of these donkeys were captured all across the island by Desiree, a task that wasn't always easy. In 2010, an injured donkey was spotted with a

broken leg, and it wasn't until 2013 (!) that she managed to capture it. While dropping off her children at school, she often encountered the donkey by the roadside.

Once, she even stumbled upon two donkeys that had escaped from the sanctuary while en route to a children's party. Dressed impeccably in a beautiful white skirt, her car got stuck in the mud. She attempted to free it herself, sacrificing her pristine skirt in the process. Eventually, a passerby helped tow her car out of the mud. She still managed to drop her children off at the party, even though she herself was no longer presentable. There are many fascinating stories like these, deserving of a book. Thanks to modern technology, locating designated spots where donkeys roam freely has become much simpler. In the past, directions might have been as vague as "right at the green house" but now, you receive a message with the precise digital location. This is far easier to follow, especially considering that a previously green house might have since turned orange.





Being a veterinarian at a donkey sanctuary also entails a myriad of experiences. Ricardo recalls instances when he had donkeys like Miracle that required around-the-clock care. He also remembers being playfully bitten on the head by Santa as a token of appreciation for his care. Fortunately, this left no lasting damage. Another unique experience was meeting an American dentist who volunteered annually in Aruba to tend to



the donkeys' teeth. Ricardo assisted this dentist and gained invaluable new experiences. He now performs these dental procedures himself using equipment received from his mentor.



One of the highlights in recent years was a trip to a conference in England, accompanied by his wife and Desiree. After the conference, they visited a donkey sanctuary in the south of England, exchanging experiences. This was especially beneficial for Ricardo, as he established numerous informative connections that he can still consult regularly.



While Ricardo is at the sanctuary weekly, Desiree is there daily. Consequently, she has accumulated even more stories. She began her journey in the Santa Lucia neighborhood when there were only 20 donkeys, and now, she oversees more than 120 donkeys at Bringamosa. The sanctuary even boasts a splendid visitor center and two apartments for four volunteers. Additionally, she cares for six donkeys at her own home, as they aren't entirely

trustworthy. All the donkeys are microchipped, and the male donkeys are all neutered.





Desiree manages all of this with the help of around 40 volunteers from both Aruba and abroad. Over the years, she has also established a stable income stream through the gift shop, adoption program, and



sponsorships. This has proven essential, as demonstrated during the past years' COVID-19 period. With the sanctuary closed and no visitors, there was zero income apart from sponsors. However, over 120 hungry donkey bellies still needed to be filled every day. Due to the border with Venezuela being closed, she had to find a new supplier for hay. Ultimately, the most reliable supplier, in terms of both quality and punctuality, turned out to be in the Netherlands. And what else? In her spare time, she enjoys painting, and these paintings are often used or sold to support the donkeysanctuary. She has authored a book about the donkeys, available in three languages. She's also involved in launching a sanctuary for approximately 300 goats, which will eventually be open to the public. So, while there's plenty of work to be done, for the next five years, her focus will remain primarily on the donkeys. Phew... what a relief!