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MY COMMUNITY

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Village Oaks daring duckling dilemma

By Holly Bowne
SPECIAL WRITER

Some may say what she did was foolish. Still others may call her a hero.

But regardless of which stance you take, one baby duckling is alive today because of the actions taken by Rebecca Wicker.

After visiting with friends one Friday afternoon in late April, the 16-year-old student decided to take her customary shortcut home, walking through the Village Oaks common area association playground.

As Wicker approached, she noticed three teenage boys, whom she didn't recognize from the area, acting strangely.

Walking closer, she saw that a grown duck lay dead on the grass.

She knew there was a duck nest full of eggs nearby, because she'd seen it before.

Anger bubbled up inside.

"I started yelling at them to get out of there now or I was calling the cops," Wicker said.

After smashing an egg, and trying unsuccessfully to scare Wicker off, the boys jumped into

their car and drove off.

Wicker rushed over to the nest and gathered up the remaining five eggs, placing them into the pockets of her jacket for protection.

At home, she and her mother, Shirley, lined a shoe box with a soft towel, and carefully placed the eggs inside. They covered them with a light cloth and placed them under a warm desk lamp.

Shirley Wicker sent an e-mail to friends and teachers asking for an incubator, or at least some advice on how to care for the eggs, in order to help her daughter save at least one duckling.

She received an immediate response from Carol Lafferty, a first-grade teacher from Wicker's former elementary school, Village Oaks.

Lafferty has done an egg-hatching project with her students every spring since she began teaching 11 years ago.

In the past, Lafferty had gotten eggs for the project from Kensington Park, or supply cata-

log. But ironically, a couple of weeks before receiving Shirley Wicker's e-mail, Teagan, the Village Oaks School therapy dog, had discovered five duck eggs in the school's courtyard.

Lafferty was already caring for those eggs when she learned of Wicker's eggs.

Wicker's five eggs were placed in Lafferty's classroom incubator along with the five eggs found by Teagan.

"I was glad to get some more eggs," Lafferty said. "I candled Rebecca's eggs and discovered that all five were still developing and alive. I estimated they were about eight days into their 28-day incubation period."

Candling is a process used to examine eggs for freshness and fertility by holding them up to a bright light.

Wicker and Lafferty watched and waited patiently.

Then on May 14, Wicker's five rescued eggs hatched.

At first they all seemed fine. Unfortunately, four of the five ducklings only lived a few days. But the fifth duckling did survive, so they named her Lucky Duck.

Teagan's five eggs hatched one week later, on May 21; and with a full week of lifetime experience under her wings, Lucky Duck became a surrogate mother to the newer ducklings.

"At first, after her siblings died, Lucky was very hyper, jumping around a lot and seemed lonely," Wicker said. "Mrs. Lafferty was hesitant to put Teagan's ducklings into the same cage with her."

But when she did, Lucky settled right down, and the little ones came nuzzling over to keep warm.

Lafferty took all six ducklings home over the summer and released them into a pond near her home.

For a while, every time they heard her voice, they would swim to shore and she would feed them duck food by hand.

Lafferty knew it was important for the ducklings to be with other ducks so they would learn to fly.

And, soon enough, she noticed they were adopted by some other ducks in the pond.

Now, as cooler temperatures begin to creep in, thanks to the efforts of one girl, there will be one more Lucky Duck flying.



Photo by Holly Bowne

Rebecca Wicker holds a small duckling she saved from the Village Oaks common area association playground.