

Going Home

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COVINGTON — Maddie, a fully-grown, 12-year-old female brown bear, has resided in two connected corn cribs at a rural Covington farm for the last seven years under the care of her owner, Kimberly Wymer.

On Tuesday Maddie's life of confinement came to an end.

Officials with a California animal sanctuary coaxed the 325 pound bear from her rusted corn crib home and in to a transport cage where she will make a cross-country trek to her new home.

And that new home is Lions Tigers & Bears, a wild animal sanctuary and rescue facility in Alpine, California, where she will begin her new life of freedom in a new 5-acre habitat. The sanctuary itself contains 55 rescued animals and 17 different species, said Bobbi Brink, founder and director of Lions Tigers & Bears.

Brink said she was happy when Wymer reached out to her and her organization, and said she was glad that Wymer decided to do the right thing for the interests of Maddie. "She (Wymer) knows she is doing the right thing for this bear," Brink said. "And Maddie knows it, too. Maddie knows she is going to get a good home. It will be nice to get this bear out of her small cage and into a habitat."

Wymer, 47, said she got Maddie from a friend who had the bear for three years, but then needed to get rid of it. Wymer said that had she not stepped in to take care of the bear from her friend that Maddie was going to be sold for \$125 to a hunting lodge for a canned hunt.

She said she would have given Maddie a new home years ago if she would have been aware of the Lions Tigers & Bears organization. Nevertheless, Wymer said Maddie's new relocation is bittersweet because she and the bear have developed an obvious bond over the course of the last seven years.

"She is not a cute and cuddly bear," Wymer said. "I mean, she is a bear. She will play with me, play paddy-cake with me one minute and the next minute she will try to bite you. ... She is a wild animal who should not be kept in two corn cribs. She should be allowed to be more of a bear."

Wymer said that when Brink and her crew pulled into the gravel driveway of the rural Covington farmhouse where Maddie has been kept, located at 6485 Mulberry Grove-Rakestraw Road, that she started to cry uncontrollably.

After about a half hour Maddie eventually made her way into her transport cage as Wymer tried coaxing her, at times holding back her emotions.

“You can do it,” Wymer said to the bear. “That’s my girl. Come on.”

“It’s like giving away a kid,” said Wymer’s husband, Duncan, 35, standing behind his wife as Maddie slowly entered the cage as the door shut behind her.

On Jan. 1, 2014, a new state law goes into effect that makes private exotic ownership of animals illegal, which is why some owners, like Wymer, are voluntarily, and proactively, surrendering their animals, said Tim Harrison, a well-known exotic animal expert who was called in to assist with the rescue.

Harrison commended Wymer for taking the bear from its previous owner, saying Wymer had good intentions, but stated that dangerous animals like Maddie should not be kept as pets.

“She took it in, so to me she is a hero, but when it comes down to it people should not have them for pets,” Harrison said. “Now Maddie is going to a beautiful place to retire. It’s going to be a happy ending for Maddie.”



Kimberly Wymer reaches her hand to "Maddie", the brown bear that has been kept in two corn cribs for the past seven years, while animal rescuers standby Tuesday outside Covington.



"Maddie" the brown bear presses her nose out one of the two corn cribs that has been her home for the last seven years on Tuesday outside Covington.