

The Mascot With The Most

CMEE's star attraction
hops away with children's hearts



BY HEATHER BUCHANAN

Henry the bunny, the official mascot of the Children's Museum of the East End in Bridgehampton, might not yet have the following of a Velveteen Rabbit, but among the youngest crowd in the Hamptons, he is just one hop away from veneration. "There's just an aura about him," says one fan. Others comment, "He's quite

the talk of the town," and, "You couldn't ask for a better welcoming committee." Henry just celebrated his third birthday, to coincide with CMEE's fifth birthday. And yes, there was carrot cake and carrot cupcakes, donated by the Water Mill Cupcake Company.

When Amy Slack, the Program Director of CMEE first interviewed for her job at the museum she said, "We should have an animal here." And when her friend

Andy Sabin, who is connected to animal adoption organizations, found Henry for her a year ago, she said she was honored to be the bunny's official "Mum."

Henry, who was named by the children during a "Pizza and Pajama Party," quickly adapted to museum life. Part of his duties as mascot is to be the official greeter, as his hutch is near the main entrance. But true to CMEE's mandate—which prides itself on being a hands-on, interactive en-

vironment—Henry pretty much has the run, or the bunny hop, of the place.

Executive Director Stephen Long notes guests' surprise, when they first meet Henry.

"People who visit, whether potential donors or potential partners say, 'Do you know there's a bunny there?' I say, 'Yeah, it's Henry our mascot. He can go anywhere,' and that seems to floor

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Henry and friends at CMEE.

ELIZA RAND PHOTOS

HOP: Henry The Rabbit Is A Much-In-Demand Star At CMEE

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them," he said.

Henry also serves as an unofficial fund raiser for CMEE, as several fans of his have donated merchandise to the gift shop.

When he's not in his favorite spot in the art room looking out the window at his summer garden home, visitors may find Henry in the fire engine trying to drive. Perhaps rabbits secretly dream of being rescue heroes.

With the museum's emphasis on exercise, Henry is as active as the kids, and he loves to leap and twirl and entertain. And despite the directions on his cage, which encourage everyone to speak softly and touch him gently, Ms. Slack reports he is great even with a mass of kids on a rainy day, happy with their enthusiastic attention.

Like Bugs, Peter, and the Easter Bunny, Henry has become a celebrity in his own right. He gets fan mail and hosts special theme parties at CMEE. Children have even dressed up as him for Halloween. He's also an excellent listener during reading hour, especially for garden stories, Ms.

Slack said.

He's one smart bunny and can even pick out the carrots on a farm tapestry on the wall. But apparently Henry hasn't accepted any outside engagements yet: those hoping he will headline their birthday parties will have to speak to his management and entourage.

While he is a social creature, Henry also has his Dietrich "I want to be alone" moments. Once the staff couldn't find him after searching everywhere and had to leave for the night not knowing his fate. In true "CSI"-style they actually surveyed hours of security video footage to try to locate the lost rabbit. Luckily Henry "Houdini" was not abducted but had found a warm and safe spot behind the vending machines.

As a Hamptons rabbit, Henry gets top-notch care from Sag Harbor veterinarian Dr. Barry Browning, who keeps him healthy as well as handsome with proper mani-pedis for his nails.

When asked if Henry might like a lady friend companion, Ms. Slack said perhaps he would. Everyone on the East End knows



Henry gets a mani-pedi from Dr. Barry Browning.

prime real estate is the great asset and Henry has a super cool Hamptons pad which is half the bachelor battle.

Henry's aura also extends to the staff. Communications Coordinator Eliza Rand states, "Being around him is the best stress release. It's very therapeutic if you're having a hectic day. He spreads a lot of good cheer."

Ultimately, it's the children's hearts he wins. One of his most loyal fans, who calls him "Hoppy," is Anya, who is 1½ years old. She said that each night as she

goes to sleep, she recites everyone who loves her: "Mama, Papa, Mimi (her babysitter), CMEE and Hoppy."

Henry's upcoming engagements include CMEE's special Thanksgiving Costume Party on Saturday, November 27, and a Gingerbread House workshop on December 18, where maybe someone will decorate a Gingerbread Hutch for him, carrots included, of course.

For more information on Henry, and the programs at the museum, visit cmee.org.