

# Hamster haven

## Caring for critters in need with The Pipsqueakery

**A**lex Hernly, a privacy specialist at Cook Group Inc., revealed something close to her heart. In 2012, she was inspired to create The Pipsqueakery, an animal sanctuary that specializes in hamsters, right in her very own home.

“My passion for helping the little critters came from knowing that they were animals that were often overlooked in shelters and other animal rescues,” Alex said. “I have always had a passion for helping underserved and vulnerable populations.”

### The beginning

When Alex was attending the Indiana University (IU) Maurer School of Law, she adopted her first three hamsters, including one she named **Pipsqueak**. It turned out that Pipsqueak was older than they realized and was starting to develop a series of health problems. That summer, the two became inseparable. One morning, Pipsqueak’s health took a turn for the worse. Alex struggled to find help because there were no vets willing to help a hamster. After Pipsqueak’s passing, Alex realized that there was a need for a rescue for older and medically needy hamsters. Inspired and determined, Alex started planning The Pipsqueakery.

**“I have always had a passion for helping underserved and vulnerable populations.”**

In 2013, she started working with the Exotic Animal Rescue and Pet Sanctuary (EARPS) in Indianapolis to foster hamsters. Her spouse and business partner, **Jason Minsterketter**, a former nurse, did photoshoots with handmade costumes and posted the pictures of their little critter models on the internet.

At the beginning of 2015, Alex led a big rescue operation through EARPS.



Alex uses her 1500 square foot basement for the sanctuary. Pictured is a small portion of the animal housing. The sewing machine.

They began coordinating adoptions and transfers to other animal rescues. According to Alex, “That’s when things got big and things got real.” Now she is the president and treasurer, and Jason is the vice-president and secretary of what has become The Pipsqueakery.

### Furry residents

While it all might have started out with three hamsters, the numbers keep growing. Most years, they take in somewhere between 100 and 150 hamsters, and on average they help rehome about 100 hamsters a year. Currently, The Pipsqueakery has 105 hamsters of five different species. Not only that, but the sanctuary is also home to 12 chinchillas, 24 rats, 7 mice, 5 guinea pigs, and 4 gerbils.

Every single animal that comes through

their doors receives a name as unique as the animals themselves. Some crowd favorites include **Winnifred**, **Mortimer**, and **Dwayne “the dorf” Booplesnoot**. The majority of their chinchillas are named after Harry Potter characters.

Almost all of the furry little friends they work with have been rescued from environments with unsuitable living conditions, and consequently they have medical needs and disabilities.

“The best thing about running The Pipsqueakery is watching a badly abused or neglected hamster learn that they are safe and loved,” Alex said.

Together, Alex and Jason work hard to care for all of their rescues. One incredible case they worked with was a chinchilla named **Lupin**. The Pipsqueakery and its brave little



is a part of making costumes for the little critters.

volunteer pioneered radiation therapy for all chinchillas with cancer, and they continue to celebrate such an extraordinary achievement.

### Logistics

In their home, the entire 1,500 square foot basement is dedicated to the pet sanctuary and hamster rescue. There are custom-made cages in two rooms of their basement, along with a kitchenette, a storage room, and a hospital area for the animals. The Pipsqueakery has all of the supplies needed to essentially run a mini clinic, including tiny intensive care units. They are even equipped with a quarantine room that runs on a separate air and heat source in a different portion of their home.

For basic care, each hamster uses about six dollars of supplies each month. That

includes food, water, bedding, chew toys, fancy treats, fun houses, and a mix of other practical and enrichment items. Collectively, it adds up to about \$13,200 a year to provide these furry rescues with their basic living needs. An additional \$6,000 goes towards vet care each year. The Pipsqueakery is a registered 501c3 nonprofit charity that runs entirely on donations from its supporters.

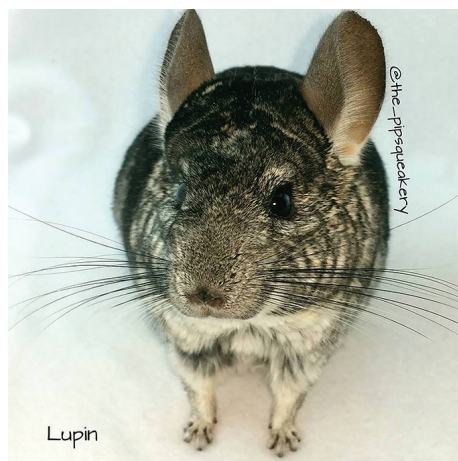
### Education and advocacy

Outside of the hamster sanctuary, Alex has even fought and petitioned for the safety and health of all hamsters. They faced one of the largest pet and small animal manufacturers in the United States, and after speaking personally with the director of the company, changes are being made to their products. The Pipsqueakery has been featured on a local television show, Friday Zone, and attended events at

***“The best thing about running The Pipsqueakery is watching a badly abused or neglected hamster learn that they are safe and loved.”***

Bloomington WonderLab in the past. Occasionally they even give tours of their house and The Pipsqueakery.

After all she has accomplished, Alex hopes to continue promoting education and advocacy for these little critters. As The Pipsqueakery continues on, they also hope to move away from doing as many adoptions and focus more on the ones that are in need of medical care.



**Lupin** pioneered radiation therapy for chinchillas with cancer. On the right is one of his x-rays.



donate adopt learn



hamsters gonna hamster

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

## Alex Hernly helps critters in need with The Pipsqueakery

### Ups and downs

Running an animal sanctuary and rescue surely has both ups and downs. It is often very difficult for Alex and Jason when an animal passes.

When one of their residents passes, Alex and Jason commemorate them by burying them in a flower pot and placing them on their deck. They pick out the perfect pot for each one and decorate it with paint and stones as unique as the animals themselves. According to Alex, this has become a comforting ritual.

"It never gets any easier, no matter how many we lose. Despite the fact that the loss is incredibly hard for us, I actually find it to be quite a privilege to offer comfort to our residents in their last days and hold them as they take their last breaths," Alex said. "It's really an honor to make their last days comfortable and happy."

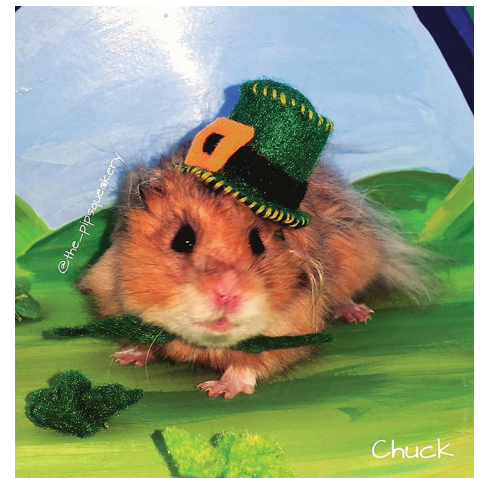
For more information, visit [www.thepipsqueakery.org](http://www.thepipsqueakery.org).

The Pipsqueakery also has a Facebook, an Instagram, and a Twitter full of photographs, updates, and projects about the animals.

— **Ally Stanfield** ([alexandria.stanfield@cookmedical.com](mailto:alexandria.stanfield@cookmedical.com)) is the Publications intern at Park 48.



Georgia



Chuck



Coke



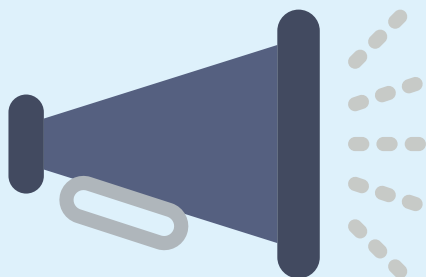
Booger



Wade



Olaf



## What's your story?

What are your hobbies? Are you involved in a cool group? Do you do volunteer work or donate your time to helping your community? Or maybe somebody in your department does. We are always looking for stories like these. So drop us a line and maybe you (or your coworker) will end up in the *Angiogram*! Send your story ideas to

[angiogram@cookmedical.com](mailto:angiogram@cookmedical.com).