

As seen in

# PARENTGUIDE



## DOWN ON THE FARM A RURAL TWIST ON MANHATTAN.

BY VICTORIA COLLETT

**A**s you leave the hustle and bustle of the busy streets of Manhattan and enter a big red barn door, you step into the fanciful world of The Art Farm. Yes, the Upper East Side has its own "farm," complete with a menagerie of fofable, cuddly, crawly, slippery, noisy and even beautiful inhabitants of a very special place.

In the summer of 1995, Mari Linnman opened The Art Farm on a 100-acre farm where horses, ducks and sheep lived harmoniously with a few artists. The barn was filled with the artists' artwork and thus became the birthplace of the first Art Farm location. Mari started with three children and now, seven years later, approximately 100 children enjoy the wonderful offerings. Later, in the summer of 2000, the Mommy & Me program was added so that Mari's son, Jonas, then 10 months old,

could enjoy the summer with her. A partnership was formed when Valentina Van Hise, a music teacher during the school year, joined energies with Mari to enhance the program.

Once inside the front door, the magic begins. A feeling of being at home greets you and welcomes you to sit for a spell on one of the sweet white wicker chairs crisply dressed in red and white gingham. But you won't sit for long when you hear the music and laughter coming from "The Pond." As you peek around the corner into the music/activity room, you see lush, green meadows surrounding a pond with two dogs lazing in the

shade of a big old tree while the children and a special furry or feathered or scaly "friend" are gathered to sing and dance and meet for the first time and every week thereafter.

Just as your giggles subside, the aroma of something heavenly catches your attention and you can't resist your curiosity to see what else might be cooking on the farm.

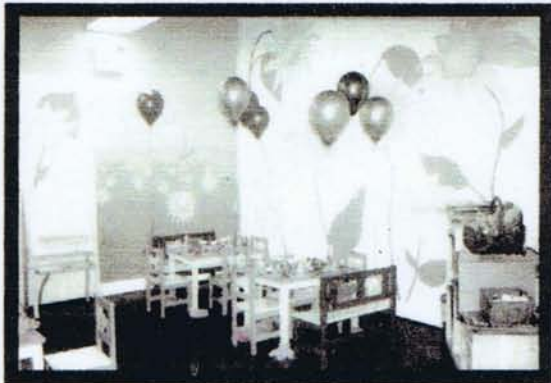
You've stumbled into a field of sunflowers with happy-faced children moving between brightly-colored tables and chairs in a huge,

tiny hands. She also invites you to test one of the cinnamon rolls. When not in use by the proud, young bakers, the cheery country kitchen becomes the art studio where a number of creations are born from the kids' imaginations using paint, glue, clay, yarn, crayon, chalk, you name it.

Delighted and eager, the sticky-faced kids gather by the door to follow the leader. As you walk along a path and pass through another barn door, you can't believe your eyes!

Some kids like the salt water tank against one wall housing the most beautiful fish they've ever seen. Others crowd around the bird aviary to talk with the amazing parrots, cockatiels or peach-faced love birds. Many squirm just a bit when Jackson (the fantastically colored parrot named after Jackson Pollock) sits on their shoulder, but they love every second of it just the same. A small and extremely active cage gets your attention and you wander over to see the teeniest black

and white finches flitting from branch to branch. It looks like they're having one big family reunion and they're all so happy to see each other. Finally, taking it all in as you turn to see what all the commotion is about, you notice a group of rose-cheeked children gathered, enthusiastically staring at a girl's shirt.



glorious country kitchen alive with the smell of fresh-baked cinnamon rolls and squeals of anticipation. You're told by the jolly baker that this is where ordinary dough becomes a woody-goey treat when mixed just so by

Surrounded by "pastures" with grazing horses off in the distance, your eyes catch sight of something moving in a bed of straw. More bunnies! And look, guinea pigs and hamsters too!

Moving closer, you see there is a charmeleon clinging to her collar and changing colors right before your eyes!

This is all so much fun, and offers so many wonderful opportunities for the children to learn and enjoy what life on a farm could be like.

Robin Fiddle, mother of Cody, says, "I must say The Art Farm is a breath of fresh country air on the Upper East Side of Manhattan."

**THE ART FARM IS OPEN ALL YEAR!  
THE ART FARM IS LOCATED AT 419 E. 91ST ST.  
BETWEEN YORK AND FIRST AVENUES.  
CALL (212)410-3117 TO BE PUT ON THE MAILING LIST.  
THEY'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING YOU  
"DOWN ON THE FARM."**

Victoria Collett is a resident wizard disguised as the program manager, smoothing the bumps in Art Farm's day-to-day business with the latest magic wand twirling trick.