

ANIMAL Sheltering

Jan/Feb 2010

The Magazine for Animal Care Professionals and Volunteers

Tips for a
Great Shelter
Website

New: Humane
Law Forum

Inside, Looking Out

Prison Programs Help Shelter Dogs



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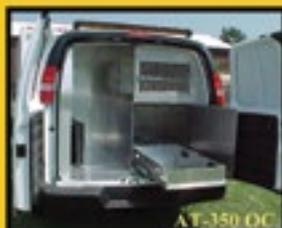
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On the Inside, Looking Out

San Quentin State Prison, California's oldest penitentiary, isn't a nice place to be. But in 2005, inmates at the prison got a little ray of sunshine: They began working with dogs from a local shelter, helping to socialize and prepare them for new homes. It's not a unique program: Dozens of prisons around the country have teamed up with area shelters and rescue groups.

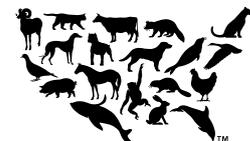


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Making It Work

Amber van Leuken, grant writer (and former assistant manager) at the Ark-Valley Humane Society in Buena Vista, Colo., recounts how the shelter revamped its volunteer program to fit its needs, rather than simply making do with whoever walked in the door that day.

In this issue we introduce a new department, Humane Law Forum, which will alternate with our Shelter Medicine column and address legal issues that shelters face daily. The inaugural column examines the issue of discrimination, asking when an adopting agency might be held liable for a decision not to adopt.
—Humane Law Forum, p. 49





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Some organizations offer “bunnymoons” to help rabbit owners find a suitable match for their lonesome pets; music store owners turn used CDs into cash to support local shelters; a former ACO connects pet owners to low-cost spay/neuter options throughout Alabama; shelter staff charged with filing their annual tax returns scramble to adapt to changes in the form used by nonprofits; a humane officer goes to extraordinary lengths (well, heights) to free a trapped bird, and more.

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Thanks to the Internet, people are conducting more and more of their lives online: shopping, socializing, doing business—and that goes for seeking a new pet, too. That’s why it’s become essential for shelters to have an online presence, and to ensure that presence contains some basic key elements. Learn about them here, and see if your site’s working for you!



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In a new department, an attorney who specializes in animal law tackles the issue of discrimination, explaining how to make sure your adoption decisions don’t leave your organization vulnerable to legal threats.

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60 Off Leash

A rescue group based in Mill Valley, Calif. has released a limited run of a frisky new wine that not only raises money to support the group’s mission, but spreads the spay/neuter message.

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Welcome to the new look of *Animal Sheltering*! It's been three years since our last overhaul, and we're trying to keep our magazine new and fresh for you.

We still have the same great content, though—good news, inspiring stories, and information that helps you work better and smarter to save animals. This issue, along with a feature about shelters and rescues that have worked with local prisons on programs to train and socialize dogs and a 101 on what makes for an effective shelter website, we're also debuting a new column, Humane Law Forum. Written by an expert on animal law, the column—which will alternate with Shelter Medicine in every other issue—will highlight legal issues that animal welfare organizations may confront. Check out the first column on p. 49!

While our appearance has changed a bit, we're still operating with the same goal: Helping you help the animals. If there's information you need, let us know! We really do respond: The website story in this issue was slated after a caller asked for a copy of a 1996 article on Web design. We realized it was high time we updated it.

We're here for you, so write to us at asm@humanesociety.org to let us know what you think, what's working for you, and what you need from us.

—Carrie, James, Jim, and Amy
Animal Sheltering magazine staff



ANDREW DEAN/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

Squirrel Supporter

I just read your article on squirrels (*Wild Things*, Sept-Oct '09, p. 18) and I wanted to both compliment and thank you for it! Well done!

I happen to be a big fan of those “plucky rodents” and am always trying to teach people to tolerate and appreciate them more. I will be including this article in my wildlife binder for our dispatch staff so that they too can better understand them and talk to the public about them.

—Scott Giacoppo
Chief Programs Officer
Washington Humane Society
Washington, D.C.

The Little Guys

Thank you for the great article in *Animal Sheltering* magazine helping to raise awareness of the value and needs of small companion animals (“Don’t Forget About Us,” Sept-Oct, p. 14). Their prospects for being adopted are just as important as those of everyone else at a shelter. I think that because of the difficult aspects of working at many shelters, people are sometimes too overwhelmed to recognize that. But times are changing, with the shelters you featured leading the way. And your article will help more and more small companion animals get the recognition they deserve. Thanks so much!

—Paula Spencer
San Anselmo, Calif.

A Fair Idea for Volunteers

I wanted to share a great idea that our director, Donna Howard, came up with recently for the Flagler Humane Society. Due to present economic conditions, our shelter could no longer afford even a part-time volunteer coordinator. Our applications from potential volunteers were piling up.

Donna organized a volunteer fair. One Saturday morning, all the potential volunteers were invited to come to the shelter, where small booths were set up highlighting each individual volunteer opportunity available. There was a “lead” person (active volunteer) in charge of their particular area. They decorated their booth and gave out information and answered questions. These lead volunteers did a wonderful job, and it was then their responsibility to follow up with the names for future training.

Over 60 people showed up [and] walked from booth to booth. Some signed up for more than one area.

It was a home run ... and probably the best volunteer orientation we've ever had.

—Amy Beilman
Vice President, Board of Directors
Flagler Humane Society
Palm Coast, Fla.

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A More Perfect Union

Matchmakers help rabbits find that special somebunny

BY ARNA COHEN

Chasing, hair pulling, and rump-sniffing aren't typical activities at a singles event, but tonight, they're *de rigueur*. This get-together is for rabbits, and this is the language of bunny love.

The most eligible bachelor is a young albino rabbit named Jake, who will have a first date with his future honey buns—three rabbits who have lived together happily for several months. Their owners want to add Jake to the mix and have left the trio at the Columbia, Md., home of Susan Wong for the introductions. As director of the Washington, D.C., rescue group Friends of Rabbits, Wong is an experienced matchmaker.

Like humans, domestic rabbits thrive in the company of their own kind. A singleton bunny may love her owner unconditionally, but her life will be much more fulfilling with a friend to groom, snuggle, and play with.



Jake, a young albino rabbit, enjoys his first "date" with three rabbits who've lived together for three months. Their owners want to add Jake to the group, and have left them at the home of Susan Wong, director of the Washington, D.C., rescue group Friends of Rabbits, for an introduction.

Rabbits can form such strong bonds with one another that when one dies, the survivor visibly grieves.

Not just any friend will do. Rabbits are as picky as humans, and the wrong combination can lead to an unhappy marriage. Only the rabbits know for sure the magic ingredients to a successful relationship, but to their credit, they don't care about looks or age.

"A lot of people who are adopting a second rabbit make the mistake of picking the one that's the cutest or matches the first one—the same size, the same color, the same breed," says Adam Goldfarb, director of The Humane Society of the United States' (HSUS) Pets at Risk program and resident rabbit expert. "Those things are really unimportant. They should try to find the best match for their rabbit's personality."

The easiest way for adopters to ensure a compatible pairing, of course, is to adopt two who have already bonded. But if someone has a lone rabbit in need of a companion, speed-dating is the way to go.

Most rabbit rescue groups have "match days," when owners can bring their animals to a foster parent's house to meet adoptable rabbits. During these speed-dating rounds, a bunny spends several minutes alone with each rabbit until he decides which one he wants to take home. Your shelter may not have considered going into the matchmaking business, but having a knowledgeable staff member or volunteer available to arrange dates can help lonely bunnies find proper

Animal Sheltering Online

Your magazine isn't just in print—it's on the Web, too. Check out this issue's online extras.

- More answers to this issue's Coffee Break question are at animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak.
- Read about a project in Pennsylvania that helps juvenile offenders develop better attitudes toward animals at animalsheltering.org/wider_horizons.
- Go to animalsheltering.org/mouthpieces to download a poster promoting senior animals.

playmates, and boost your organization's rabbit adoptions as well.

Single rabbits in Milwaukee can drop in at the Wisconsin Humane Society, where the adoption counselors are experienced at making hare pairs. Most of the rabbits' owners are experienced as well, says counseling services manager Stacy Juedes. "Many of the bunnies that come in have recently lost a companion. The owners know that compatibility is important and are doing what's best for the rabbit."

Sometimes an adopter may spend hours at the shelter looking for the right combo. "We usually do two or three introductions in one date," says Angela Speed, director of community relations. The date ends if the adopter's rabbit doesn't like what he sees or is getting too stressed; it may take several dates before a new friend is found.

The rabbit rendezvous at Wong's house was a bit different from the standard date. The bachelor bunny, Jake, was chosen by the human family, not by their rabbits.

It's not ideal, but such arranged marriages work out most of the time, says Wong: "It just takes a little more effort when they don't get to pick their friends."

Either way, introductions should take place in a neutral space, advises Margo

[scoop]

DeMello of Albuquerque, N.M., president of the international House Rabbit Society. “Rabbits are super territorial. In the wild, they would never allow strange rabbits into their space, which means we have to set things up artificially so that [the bonding] is more likely to succeed.” Having the rabbits meet away from their home turf lessens the chance of fighting and encourages attachment. It’s also essential that the rabbits be spayed or neutered; raging hormones can drastically interfere with the dating process.

When Barbara Henderson decided that Fiver, her 4-year-old neutered male, needed a friend, she opted for Wong’s dating service. “I had him for about two years as a single rabbit, and he seemed fine with that,” says Henderson, an HSUS shelter services coordinator. “Then he chewed a huge hole in the wall and started head-butting the cats. I think he really wanted a playmate.”



Susan Wong—director of the rescue group Friends of Rabbits—feeds some rabbits she has taken in from the Animal Welfare League of Arlington, Va. They’ll stay in Wong’s home while awaiting adoption.

Male-female pairings generally have a greater success rate, so Fiver first met several females. But he ignored the girls and was drawn to Snowball, an older male rabbit twice his size. Within minutes, they were grooming each other.

Not all introductions go so smoothly. Unfamiliar rabbits often chase and mount

each other, pull fur, and thump their feet—it’s their way of establishing a pecking order and learning to speak the other’s language. This behavior usually subsides as the animals grow more comfortable. Brief spats are also normal, but matchmakers watch for serious signs of aggression: flattened ears, raised tails, arched backs. If vicious fighting—including biting and “boxing”—breaks out, the rabbits are separated immediately, and a different candidate is brought in.

Fiver and Snowball were an amiable duo, but they didn’t go home immediately. The next step was the “bunnymoon,” a bonding period that can last anywhere from a few days to several weeks. The two shared a pen for several days, with Wong closely supervising for signs of discord.

Wong typically starts introductions on a Friday night so she has the weekend to work with a new pair. “I’ll stay up all night if I need to,” she says. If they start fighting, she’ll put them in a carrier and take them for a car ride. “They’re both scared and rely on each other for comfort.” A couple of car rides is usually all it takes for an indecisive couple to take the plunge.

Car rides were unnecessary for Fiver and Snowball (renamed Rorschach). Now at home, Fiver has become extremely protective of his companion. “If one of the other animals gets too close, Fiver attacks,” Henderson says. “He’s pulled fur out of the cats. Rorschach just watches and hops away.”

As for Jake, Wong reports that less than 24 hours after their introduction, he was inseparable from his new sweethearts.

The Wisconsin Humane Society doesn’t host bunnymoons, but it does send adopters home with plenty of information, and advice is just a keystroke or phone call away. “We’re pretty confident that the bonding process will go well in their homes. It’s so unusual for a properly matched pair not to bond that I can’t think of one time when that’s happened,” says Juedes.

Rebecca Kingery, an animal care technician at the Animal Welfare League of Arlington in Virginia, agrees. “The only cases I’ve seen that

Pass on These Tips to Adopters to Bring On Bunny Bliss

- If you already have a rabbit and you’re planning to adopt another, turn your home into neutral territory. Clean areas your rabbit has occupied with vinegar to remove his scent, and use new bedding and toys in the cage or pen.
- Try to bring new rabbit companions home on a weekend so you can monitor their interactions. Be prepared to intervene with a squirt gun if you notice any tension, and wear heavy gloves for your protection.
- If the bunnies have trouble adjusting, set them up in side-by-side pens for a while so they can get used to each other’s presence without injury. Or they may need to go back to the matchmaker’s house for a short stay. Call the rescue group or shelter for advice.

haven’t worked well are when owners haven’t followed our recommendations, like trying to acclimate the rabbits too quickly.”

While many rescue groups won’t bond rabbits unless one has been adopted from the organization, others are willing to provide bunnymoons for a small donation. AWLA works closely with Friends of Rabbits, and if an adopter is having problems or seems unsure about the bonding process, Kingery refers them to Wong for bunnymoon assistance.

Once a bunny bond is forged, almost nothing will break it apart. Not every couple will groom each other or cuddle, and some may bicker, but as DeMello notes, “It’s very rare for two rabbits not to get along in some way.” Occasionally an external stress can touch off fighting. This was the case with Squirt, Inkling, and Princeton, peaceful housemates who started skirmishing after their humans had a baby. But a short stay at Wong’s house for some reinforcement and renewal of vows was all that was needed to restore harmony to the household. 

Family Values for a Different Kind of Family

The Wildlife Aid Brigade works to keep wild babies and their kin together and safe

BY RUTHANNE JOHNSON

Where might you find a shoebox, a sock, chemical hand warmer, a juice carton, a bungee cord, a set of binoculars, and a net all in one place?

Check the kit of wildlife rehabilitator Sue Lunsun Farinato. She carries these tools in her car at all times.

She's not planning to bungee jump into a damaged squirrel nest or present a deer with a new pair of killer pumps. The bungee cord and the juice carton can be used to create a makeshift home for an animal whose nest has been destroyed. The shoebox can hold a small injured animal for transport, and the sock and chemical hand-warmer will keep him warm during the trip. Every item in her tool kit is there for a purpose: Helping her save the lives of wild creatures who've run into one misfortune or another.

Farinato, who spends her days as a program assistant in The Humane Society of the United States' Pets at Risk program, doesn't stop thinking about animals in her off hours.

The tools she hauls around in her trunk are also educational, helping her demonstrate techniques during the specialized training program she developed to teach students the basics of wildlife rescue in the urban environment. Based in Washington, D.C. and formed in 2007, the Wildlife Aid Brigade helps animal shelters and other agencies deal with wildlife-related calls by teaching their staff and volunteers how to handle the conflicts that arise when humans come face to face with the wild in their own yards and attics.

Farinato has been involved in wildlife rescue and rehabilitation for more than 10 years, and she says that while great strides have been made in getting people to resolve conflicts more humanely, our society has a long way to go.

"It takes special knowledge and care when it comes to helping wild animals without harming them," she explains, "and most people know very little about wildlife—even the creatures who live in their own backyard."

Wild animals in suburban and urban environments are surrounded by hazards: speeding cars, sharp-bladed lawnmowers, pet attacks. Animals also compete with humans



Using the bodies of wild animals who were too sick or badly injured for successful rehabilitation, volunteers learn the anatomical features of various species and get to practice handling techniques without stressing live animals.

for space, sometimes choosing a warm attic or a chimney for shelter. Most people have little tolerance for animals nesting in their homes, and eviction is an all-too-common solution.

When this is done, parents and their young can be killed, injured, or separated from each other. A homeowner cuts down a tree limb, and the attached squirrel's nest filled with unweaned babies falls to the ground. A mother duck is shooed out of a backyard while her ducklings scatter and hide in the bushes. A raccoon family is trapped in an attic by a nuisance wildlife control operator who—unbeknownst to the homeowner—kills the mother and her babies after he leaves the property.

Farinato would like to see such problems occur less frequently. People who have conflicts with local wildlife typically call their local

animal shelter, police department, wildlife care center, or nuisance wildlife trapper. In 2003, Farinato was asked by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) to participate in crafting and executing a survey tracking incoming wildlife calls for all the major agencies in the D.C. area. The survey documented thousands of wildlife-related calls to these agencies, with a huge spike in calls between April and September—baby season.

It also tracked the results of each call, which typically hinged on which agency received it. Here there was a huge discrepancy: Calls to nuisance trappers usually ended in death for the animal, while calls to wildlife care centers tended to have a much more positive outcome. Calls to animal shelters and other agencies fell somewhere in between.

[scoop]

Animal shelters and municipal animal control agencies are primarily trained to deal with companion animals, and rarely have the time or the training to determine if an animal should be left in the wild or brought in for care, Farinato says. Once an ACO is dispatched to the scene, he will usually scoop up the animal and take it back to the local animal shelter for holding until it can be transported to the nearest wildlife rehabilitation center.

That's not the worst that could happen, but it's often not the best option, either: Many of these cases involve perfectly healthy wild babies who merely need to be re-nested or reunited with their parent. While shelters justifiably euthanize critically injured or sick animals, they may end up euthanizing a healthy animal if nearby wildlife rehabilitation centers have no available space.

"Many wildlife situations call for nothing more than a little knowledge, patience, and time," Farinato says. "This is particularly true when it comes to keeping a baby animal together with its family, but animal control officers don't have 90 minutes to watch a



Volunteers learn to make substitute nests for baby birds whose nests were destroyed or who had fallen from nests too high to reach. Substitute nests often help reunite baby birds with parents.

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fledgling on the ground to make sure it has not been abandoned, let alone the time it takes to renege a baby animal and then wait to see if its parent returns.”

During her eight years volunteering at a local wildlife rehabilitation center, Farinato says, about 50 percent of the animals brought in were perfectly healthy babies who were probably not even orphaned.

For Farinato, the survey results highlighted serious flaws in the system. It was the impetus for her creation of the Wildlife Aid Brigade.

She went to the COG committee and pitched her idea for a volunteer-based program, in which people who’d been trained on proper wildlife response would work out of a local animal shelter. Three shelters—the Animal Welfare League of Arlington, the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria, and Prince George’s County Animal Services—were the first to sign up.

Wildlife Aid Brigade students attend several classroom sessions, including one at a working wildlife rehabilitation center. After the classroom segment, students begin volunteering through their preferred shelter. They do ride-alongs with an animal control officer, answer wildlife-related phone calls, and eventually handle rescue calls in the field—when rescue is actually necessary.

“It was a new approach to take, that we were going to try and leave healthy wildlife in the wild instead of having these babies go out to rehabbers,” says Jennifer Newman, manager of education and community services for Animal Welfare League of Arlington.

Going into her shelter’s third year of participation, Newman says the program has enhanced her staff’s knowledge about wildlife, freed up time for animal control officers to focus more on companion animal calls, and improved public relations. “People seem to really appreciate the time that volunteers give when they go out on a call, and this has helped put us more in the public eye,” she says.

More importantly, Newman says the program has undoubtedly saved animals’ lives, directly and indirectly. “Having volunteers spend time in the field gives the public opportunities to ask questions and to become more comfortable with wildlife living near to them.”

Wildlife Aid Brigade volunteer Regina Evans works out of the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria and remembers a situ-



Doing his best E.T. impression, a squirrel who invaded a homeowner’s basement tries to hide from the Wildlife Aid Brigade.

ation that could easily have ended badly, had the nuisance trapper that the homeowner also called arrived first.

A squirrel had made its way into the homeowner’s basement, and when Evans arrived she found it hiding on a shelf lined with the woman’s stuffed animal collection—koalas, bears, ponies, and birds. “It was so funny because every once in a while the squirrel would peek out from behind a stuffed bear to see what we were doing,” says Evans.

Working with another volunteer, she cleared the area around the shelf, caught the squirrel with a net, and released her into the homeowner’s back yard, where she promptly ran up a tree and began chattering. Evans also educated the homeowner, who had no idea about what nuisance wildlife trappers typically do with the animals they catch. “The woman was so grateful for our help that she said wanted to make a donation to the shelter,” Evans says.

Eventually, Farinato hopes to take the training to a national level. If your shelter struggles to handle wildlife calls and you’re interested in learning more, contact Farinato at info@wildlifeaidbrigade.org or visit her website at wildlifeaidbrigade.org. 

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Unwanted CDs benefit upstate New York SPCA

It didn't start with a vision, exactly. It started with a bunch of scratchy CDs.

People looking to sell their used CDs would bring stacks of them to Bill Boehm's store in upstate New York, the CD Exchange, which he operated for 11 years before closing in 2008. The problem was that he couldn't take them all. "I'm really picky," Boehm says, noting that he had earned a reputation for selling only like-new merchandise. Sometimes the CDs were simply too beat up to meet his standards. Other times it was a case of too much supply, not enough demand; he'd look at certain titles and say, "I already have 10 of these, and I haven't sold one in a year, so I don't need any more."

Most customers took the rejection in stride, Boehm says, but some "would be like, 'You know what? I don't even want these things. Just chuck 'em for me.'" Knowing that CDs last forever in a landfill, and that even the scratched ones usually play pretty well, Boehm hated to throw them away. So he started keeping a stack of the rejects on the counter next to his cash register, along with a sign inviting people to help themselves.

About four years ago, he decided it would be "cool" to sell those less-than-desirable CDs for a nominal price—say, 50 cents or \$1—and donate the proceeds to a charity. Boehm's wife, Jen, suggested the SPCA Serving Erie County in nearby Tonawanda, N.Y., where the couple had adopted their dog, Mollie.

Boehm christened the program Discs for Dogs, created a website (*DiscsForDogs.org*), and set up a "Used & Abused" bin in the corner of his store to house the discs. From there, "It just kind of grew. People in the store, my customers, loved it," he says, estimating that the program raised between \$100 and \$200 in its first month. When he'd send SPCA officials a check at the end of each month, "They were really happy about it, and it generated a lot of goodwill for my store. ... Everybody loves animals."

Customers began bringing bags of CDs to the store specifically to donate them to Discs for Dogs, and Boehm announced via the website that he would also take donations through the mail.

What type of music do people unload most frequently? "All the boy band crap, stuff like that," Boehm replies, listing 'N Sync, the Backstreet Boys, and Britney Spears as some of the prime contributors to the Discs for Dogs stock.

Boehm closed his retail store in September 2008 to concentrate on his online business (*thecdexchange.com*). Luckily for Discs for

gram continues to thrive. Erie County SPCA executive director Barbara Carr says the program contributed \$1,371 in the first 11 months of last fiscal year—without any effort by the shelter. "It goes into the general fund, and we are very, very grateful for it," Carr says.

Avery says Discs for Dogs is going "unbelievably well," and one person's musical trash



Bill Boehm, owner of *thecdexchange.com*, started Discs for Dogs, which sells unwanted CDs and DVDs to benefit the SPCA Serving Erie County in upstate New York. Boehm's dog Mollie "helps" sort the stacks.

Dogs, there's more than one animal-loving used CD store owner in western New York state. Boehm handed the retail portion of the program to his friend Jeff Avery, who runs FrizB's CD Exchange in Kenmore, a suburb of Buffalo. "He's kind of a kindred soul," Boehm says, explaining that Avery, independent of Discs for Dogs, was already selling music-related stickers and posters and donating the proceeds to the Erie County SPCA. Avery says he started that program as a tribute to his late cat Nigel, whom he'd had for 15 years.

Boehm and Avery agree that, in the age of downloads and iPods, CD stores are a dying business, but the Discs for Dogs pro-

gram is often another's treasure. He notes with amusement that some of his customers shop almost exclusively in the Discs for Dogs bin. When he rings up their purchases, "I'll say, 'OK, that's 20 bucks—three dollars for the store and 17 for the Discs for Dogs program.' People just really like the CDs they can find, and the price obviously is good."

When Boehm gets inquiries from animal welfare organizations looking to start something similar, he tells them to call their local CD store and go for it. "I'd be honored," he says. "... It's something that could easily be done in any city, really." **AS**

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—reported by HSUS of Vero Beach, Florida, *Sheltering Magazine* July 2007



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Chipping Away at an Old Problem

Study suggests that microchipping and database registration should happen concurrently

BY CARRIE ALLAN

When it comes to progress on the effective use of identification microchips in pets, the U.S. hasn't been a global leader. But we can take steps to use this technology more successfully, suggest the authors of a recent study published in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (JAVMA)*.

Seeking to find out more about the microchipped animals coming into shelters and the process shelter staff use to try to locate their owners, researchers collected data on 7,704 microchipped animals who entered 53 animal shelters. Slightly more than half were stray; the remainder were owner-relinquished.

Microchipped strays represented only a small percentage of the overall number of strays admitted across the shelters surveyed. Unsurprisingly, the median percentage of microchipped stray dogs (3.9 percent) was substantially higher than that of microchipped stray cats (0.4 percent).

The presence of a microchip had a significant positive impact on overall return-to-owner (RTO) rates at the shelters: 73 percent of the owners of these microchipped pets were found. The average RTO rate for all stray dogs taken in by the shelters was 21.9 percent; that rose to 52.2 percent for chipped dogs. Feline strays had an overall RTO rate of only 1.8 percent—but chipped stray cats had a 38.5 percent RTO rate.

For chipped animals about whom the shelters contacted the microchip registries (some never got to this stage, as when owner info was in the shelter's own database), only 58.1 percent were found to be registered. "Although some of the owners who were not registered were found by other methods ... this required a substantial amount of additional time for the shelter staff and increased the risk that the owner would not be found," the authors write.

This points to the need for improvements to the registration process and a need for pet owner education on the registry issue. "The

MOUThPIECES)))))))



The Mouthpieces department is designed to help you communicate your messages to the public. Just add

your organization's contact information and hang it up in your lobby or hand it out, as appropriate. You don't need to tear out the page: Go to animalsheltering.org/mouthpieces to download and print a clean PDF copy.

Send suggestions for future Mouthpieces to asm@humansociety.org.



United States," the authors write, "is the only country in which the implantation of a microchip is often treated as a separate process from registration with a microchip registry." In other countries, the two services are bound together—so when a person gets their pet microchipped, the owner's information will be registered in the microchip database at the same time.

Their research also identified other areas in the microchipping process that need improvement. About 20 percent of the shelters scanned incoming animals only once; however, an additional 12.6 percent of microchips were only found because shelters scanned more than once during the animals' stays. On top of that, 1.6 percent of microchips were found in atypical areas of the animals' bodies, indicating that the chips had migrated after implantation.

Scanning protocols at shelters "should include scanning at various routine times during animal handling, such as at entry, during medical evaluations, and prior to euthanasia," the authors write.

To read the entire study and see more findings, check out "Characterization of animals with microchips entering animal shelters" in *JAVMA* (Vol. 235, No. 2). **AS**

It Takes a Long Time to Get This Sweet.

You want a puppy? Aw, come on. Aren't you a little more discriminating?

Pets, like fine wine, improve with age.

When I think about all the dumb things I did as a puppy, I just want to howl with embarrassment! The chewing of shoes. The peeing on rugs. The unfortunate incident with that cat, which is best not discussed.

But now I'm older and wiser. I may be a little slower, but I'm also smarter and calmer and less likely to drive you crazy. I'm ready to be your friend and couch-mate, to share long walks and evenings in front of the fire.

I'll romp like a puppy sometimes, but not all the time. Believe me, that's something you'll appreciate at three in the morning.

So go check out the puppies and the kittens, and then, when you're ready for a mature relationship, come back to me—or one of the older cats. (They paid me to say that.)

I've got a lot of love left to give. Will you let me give it to you?



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES



Better Options for Horses

In our Sept-Oct 2009 issue, we reported on the ongoing efforts of rescuers working to find good homes for abandoned and surrendered horses. We detailed the cooperative efforts between equine rescue groups, The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), and horseman Pat Parelli—a team effort that’s saving lives and changing people’s minds about the quality of the horses who end up at slaughter auctions (“The Long Way Home,” p. 25).

Keeping a horse requires a great commitment of time and money, and in these difficult economic times, some people are struggling

with the financial side. Other horse owners keep their animals for the entirety of their lives, but still have to figure out what to do with their horses when the animals eventually become old or sickly.

Some of these folks may have been led to believe that sending their horses to slaughter is the only option. But equine experts at The HSUS advise that is never the case: Anyone who has been managing the monthly expenses of caring for a horse can afford the one-time cost of humane euthanasia and disposal.

Providing a humane, peaceful end to the life of an equine companion is just part of the responsibility of any horse owner, says Keith Dane, director of Equine Protection at The HSUS. “No one likes to think about the death of a beloved companion, but planning ahead is key to understanding your options,” says Dane.

To help horse owners prepare, The HSUS has developed a list of resources for those looking for humane end-of-life options for their equine companions. The list includes state-by-state information on low-cost euthanasia programs, equine crematories, horse cemeteries, rendering facilities and landfills. State agriculture and veterinary contacts and state regulations are also included.

The HSUS encourages animal welfare groups, equine shelters, and rescue organizations to pass along these resources to those seeking to make the right decision for their horses—and to notify the Equine Protection staff at The HSUS if they know of other resources that are not yet listed here. Together, we can do more to ensure that horses who’ve been lifelong companions and helpers are provided with a humane and dignified end.

For the list, go to humanesociety.org/animals/horses/facts/humane_horse_remains_disposal.html. 



**HUMANE SOCIETY
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Get Smart—and Certified—at HSU

Humane Society University, an affiliate of The Humane Society of the United States, has received a license as a higher education degree-granting institution by the District of Columbia Education Licensure Commission. The HSUS is the first animal welfare organization to receive this licensure.

“Offering Bachelor of Science degrees and graduate certificates makes sense in today’s world of complex human-animal relationships,” says Robert Roop, Ph.D., president of Humane Society University. “The interdisciplinary curriculum offered by HSU is unmatched by any other licensed scholastic body in the world.”

HSU offers Bachelor of Science degrees and graduate certificate programs in animal studies, animal policy and advocacy, and humane leadership, as well as professional instruction on everything from animal sheltering basics to fundraising to combating compassion fatigue and illegal animal fighting. Professional development courses are offered as in-person workshops throughout the country; online courses are available as well.

For more information, visit humanesocietyuniversity.org. 



Stemming the Tide of Pet Overpopulation in Alabama

Former ACO Donald Kendrick is a one-man band, spreading the word about spay/neuter and connecting pet owners to low-cost options in their area

The day that Donald Kendrick had to euthanize 52 healthy cats and kittens to ease overcrowding at the Blount County Animal Shelter in Cleveland, Ala., the animal control officer decided that there had to be something better to do with himself.

That “something better,” he decided, was to retire from animal control and spend his time combating pet overpopulation at its source by setting up Spay Alabama, a clearinghouse of low-cost spay/neuter resources throughout the state. In a single phone call to the toll-free line, pet owners can get contact numbers for low-cost options in their areas.

With funding from Spay USA and Maddie’s Fund, the clearinghouse opened in October 2007 with one person—Kendrick—fielding calls. The phone has been ringing off the hook ever since; by the end of 2008, more than 2,000 calls had come in. The 2009 numbers will be even greater.

Today Spay Alabama is still a one-man show, run out of Kendrick’s house in Hueytown, just west of Birmingham. But Kendrick won’t use an answering machine, preferring to answer every call himself. “Some of the callers are on the fence already about whether they’re going to [spay or neuter], whether they can afford it,” he says, noting that the majority of callers have more than one pet in need of spay/neuter. “If they call and just get a message, that may be the end of it, so I try hard to be available.” This means having his cell phone and his little black book with him at all times, even while feeding his “gull friends” during a September beach vacation.

Kendrick draws the public’s attention to the tragedy of pet overpopulation with spay/neuter campaign materials and customized public service announcements provided by The Humane Society of the United States as part of the post-Katrina initiative to improve the lives of Gulf Coast cats and dogs. The heightened awareness and ease of accessing information, combined with the opening of three high-volume, low-cost clinics in Birmingham, Montgomery, and Dothan in the last two years, have given the spay/neuter

campaign in Alabama an enormous boost; more than 13,000 surgeries have been performed by the Alabama Spay/Neuter Clinic in Birmingham since it opened in June 2008.

Spay Alabama is also the beneficiary of The HSUS’s annual Spay Day USA event. A \$5,000 grant to the organization from the Doris Day Animal Foundation allowed 200 pets to be spayed and neutered as part of the 2009 promotion, and, due to Kendrick’s tireless efforts to publicize the event, the state has landed on the top 10 list for most Spay Day surgeries in the two years Spay Alabama has participated. In 2007, only 620 animals were spayed or neutered, and \$1,255 was raised to support the spay/neuter program; in 2009, with Kendrick fueling the fire, 1,655 surgeries were performed, and \$6,010 was raised.

Realizing that feral cats are a significant part of the feline overpopulation problem, Kendrick uses his contacts to assist colony caretakers with trap-neuter-return, pointing them to agencies in their area that work with ferals. Where no resources exist, he steps in to arrange trapping and transporting. “A few months ago I went 100 miles to a very rural area and trapped 23 cats in one morning,” he says. “These people wanted help, and they were willing to do what we asked them to do.” Kendrick trains caretakers on managing colonies with DVDs and educational material from The HSUS’s Feral Cat Program.

Kendrick’s ultimate goal is to put himself out of business. “The sooner the better,” he says. “It’s not about empire-building.”

In his spare time, Kendrick—who does all of his work for spay/neuter on a volunteer ba-

sis—travels around Alabama speaking to city councils, mayors, “whoever will have me,” about why spay/neuter programs are critical for saving lives and taxpayers’ dollars.

He credits his successes to having the



Pinky, a former feral cat, watches over Donald Kendrick as he works at his desk at home. Kendrick’s the founder—and sole staff member—of Spay Alabama, a clearinghouse of low-cost spay/neuter resources throughout the state.

time to devote to his mission and knowing how to appeal to his audience. “Some folks, all they care about is money. If you show them in dollars and cents that it’s the right thing to do, it catches on.”

He recalls the time he spoke to a county commission, and could tell his audience wasn’t that interested. “Half of them were asleep,” he says. “I said, ‘I’m here to help you save money and get reelected.’ They woke up and listened to what I had to say.” AS

Go to humanesociety.org/spayday to organize or find a Spay Day event in your community.

Dealing with Death

Study identifies coping strategies for staff stress related to euthanasia

BY JIM BAKER

Vent your feelings. Alter your emotional attachment level. Know that euthanasia is sometimes the best option.

In a survey of animal shelter employees from 62 shelters in the United States, these are among the many coping strategies that euthanasia technicians recommend for dealing with euthanasia-related strain.

The survey, recently published in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (JAVMA)*, sought to identify and evaluate coping strategies advocated by experienced shelter workers who directly participate in euthanasia. Experts from The Humane Society of the United States helped the authors identify 88 shelters across the country where euthanasia is performed; staff at 62 shelters agreed to participate in the survey.



JOSHBLAKE/ISTOCK

The survey asked: "What recommendations would you give to someone who is just starting out in this career field? That is, what would you tell them to do, or not to do, to deal with the euthanasia-related aspects of this job?"

Coping strategies suggested by 242 euthanasia technicians were summarized into 26 different coping recommendations, which were then grouped into eight larger categories: competence or skill strategies, euthanasia behavioral strategies, cognitive or self-talk strategies, emotional regulation strategies, separation strategies, get-help strategies, seek long-term solution strategies, and withdrawal strategies.

In the coping recommendation "Vent your feelings"—advice provided by 15.7 percent of workers—some examples of survey responses were: "Cry," "Get your feelings out," and "Talk about your feelings."

In the coping recommendation "Alter your emotional attachment level," which 15.3 percent of staff provided, some survey responses were: "Do not get attached to any animal," "Not to take things personally, but still have compassion," "Do not become uncaring. ... Do not build up a wall," and "Treat each one as you would your own [pet]."

The third-highest coping recommendation that staff offered, "Know that euthanasia is sometimes the best option"—provided by 14.1 percent of employees—included survey responses such as: "Try to remember that they're not getting hit by cars or slowly starving to death," and "The animal is better to be euthanized than to possibly go to a home where they might be mistreated or thrown out on the street to fend for themselves."

Identification of coping strategies recommended by staff, the authors write, can benefit the animal protection field in two ways. "First, it elucidates the strategies that experienced euthanasia technicians may be recommending to new employees, and shelter managers may find this information useful for discussion and training. Second, it provides insight into euthanasia technicians' responses to euthanasia."

To read more about the study's methodology and results, see "Euthanasia-related strain and coping strategies in animal shelter employees," in *JAVMA* (Vol. 235, No. 1).

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[scoop]

Kicking Butt and Taking Puppies

Want to help save puppy mill dogs? Become a Placement Partner



During the past two years, The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) assisted local agencies with 24 puppy mill raids, resulting in the rescue of more than 5,000 dogs—puppies and their poor breed-exhausted mothers—from the hideous conditions found in these factory-style breeding operations.

The job could not have been completed without extensive, on-the-ground assistance from local shelters, especially with the placement of the animals after seizure. Removing large numbers of animals in a short period of time can be a challenge for local agencies to handle alone, and in these cases, The HSUS was ready and prepared to help. Likewise, The HSUS relies on similar collaborations with shelters and rescue groups to take in seized animals in order to rehabilitate and place them in loving homes.

Now those essential relationships are being made official. The Emergency Services Placement Partners (ESPP) program is for organizations or agencies that want to work with the animals rescued in HSUS-assisted cruelty raids. The HSUS is seeking to welcome new organizations to the team, solidify relationships with groups that have previously expressed interest, and formalize existing relationships with organizations that have stepped up to help in the past.

Want to help us put puppy mills out of business and find good homes for dogs who have never known anything but a wire cage? Check out the new program at animalsheltering.org/espp. AS

A large advertisement for HoundQuarters Kennels. The background is a photograph of a modern, single-story kennel building with a stone and brick facade. A large dog, possibly a Weimaraner, is sitting in the foreground, looking towards the camera. A group of people is gathered outside the building, some with dogs. The ad includes a logo for HoundQuarters Kennels, a list of features, and contact information for the City of Sugar Land Animal Services Facility.

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Caws for Alarm

Humane officer branches out to attempt daring, aerial rescue to free trapped bird

Andy O'Brien doesn't give up easily—even when his job drives him up a tree.

O'Brien, a humane officer with the Marin Humane Society in Novato, Calif., was working the swing shift—3 to 11 p.m.—on a Sunday last summer when he got an emergency call. Monique Bricca of nearby San Rafael said a crow was hanging upside down in her backyard, his legs tangled in fishing line, 40 to 50 feet in the air from a branch in a pine tree.

After 5:30 p.m. on his shift, O'Brien is on his own, covering the whole of Marin County by himself. After responding to other calls, he got to Bricca's home around 8:30 p.m.

Using his flashlight, he located the bird in the tree and could see it was still alive. O'Brien contacted the San Rafael Fire Department for help, requesting a ladder.

"They were super helpful; they brought a couple of fire trucks out. Sometimes they kind of laugh it off—you know, 'What? You want to go up there to get a bird?' And I'm like, 'Well, that's what I do: You put out fires, I rescue animals,'" he says.

O'Brien duct-taped his knife to an extension pole he carries with him, one that has a small net at the end. He climbed the ladder and tried three times to reach out to cut the fishing line to free the bird, but the pole had too much give to it.

So he and the firefighters assembled a pole using lengths of white PVC pipe that could be fitted together, his knife attached to the end of it. And O'Brien climbed the ladder again.

"I was hanging on by one arm wrapped around a tree branch, and my feet were on the second rung from the top of the ladder. Even with the light on it, it was really hard to see a thin fishing line in the dark," he says.

"I had a couple of attempts, and my arm was hurting by now. But I didn't want to give up. I really would have hated to leave that bird there to die; it would have bothered me."

The firefighters wanted O'Brien to give up and come down, for safety reasons. "I said, 'Just give me one more chance, one more go, I think I can get it,'" he says.

So O'Brien ascended the ladder once more, this time actually climbing into the tree, which gave him about another foot of reach. The



Andy O'Brien, a humane officer with the Marin Humane Society, undertook a risky rescue last July to free a crow dangling upside down from fishing line, about 50 feet high in a tree.

firefighters waited below with one of O'Brien's large, fishing-style nets. "I said, 'Look, if the bird falls, just do your best to catch it.' I took one more swipe [with the knife], and I got it."

O'Brien had cut the bird free, but rather than falling into the net below, the crow righted itself and swooped off over a neighbor's fence, out of sight.

"I figured, 'Well, I got him down, he flapped his wings, he glided nicely away, he'll be fine.'" And so O'Brien and the firefighters left the scene, figuring they'd done their best.

But that's not the end of the story.

The following day, a call came in about an injured crow at the house next door. O'Brien figured it was probably the same crow he'd released the night before.

He drove out to the house, and sure enough—it was the same crow he'd freed earlier. The bird's feet were still entwined in fishing line, but at least the crow was still alive. He cut away as much as he could of the line, then delivered the bird to WildCare in San Rafael, an urban wildlife rehabilitation center.

There, the staff tried to get the bird healthy and back into the wild, but unfortunately fell short. He was treated and appeared well on his way to release, but was found dead in the center's pre-release aviary on July

30, according to Melanie Piazza, director of animal care.

Necropsy results were inconclusive. He had hemorrhaging in the kidneys and spleen, but there was no way to know if that came from the bird's ordeal hanging upside down or from possible trauma in the aviary. He could have been startled at night by something and flown into a wall.

"The plan was to give him time in the aviary to be sure he was 100 percent back on his feet again, so to speak, before release. ... Everyone was incredibly sad that his story ended this way. We all had plans for a grand release for him after he survived such an ordeal," Piazza says.

Bricca remains impressed with O'Brien's efforts.

"It was really an amazing act of bravery; Andy was not going to give up until the crow was free. I do think this was above and beyond the call of duty, and Andy should really get some recognition for it," she says.

O'Brien says that's simply what his job entails.

"That's why I'm in this business—I want to save what I can, no matter how small it is. It doesn't have to be a dog or a cat ... it can be a bird, too." **AS**

[scoop]

More Details, Please ...

Newly redesigned Form 990 proves taxing for nonprofit shelters filing with the IRS

BY JIM BAKER



Each year, while millions of Americans slave over their Forms 1040, nonprofit animal shelters are working on their Forms 990.

The annual return that certain federally tax-exempt organizations have to file with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) underwent a major redesign in 2007. The process has gotten a little more complicated for nonprofits, and that has some shelter administrators scrambling to get up to speed on the changes.

The form provides the IRS and the public with a window into an organization's mission, programs, and finances.

With some exceptions, federally tax-exempt nonprofits that have incomes of more than \$25,000 have to file a Form 990. So do all 501(c)(3) private foundations, no matter their income level.

Unlike an individual's taxes that are due April 15, there's no one date when all Forms 990 have to be submitted to the IRS. Rather, a nonprofit's filing date is determined by the end of its fiscal year—the 12-month period for which the organization plans to use its funds. Each filing organization has to file "by the 15th day of the 5th month after" its fiscal year ends.

Organizations can also receive up to two 90-day extensions of time to file.

Starting with tax returns filed in 2009 for 2008, nonprofits have to file the redesigned Form 990 that requires them to go into much greater detail about possible conflicts of interest, how board members and staff are compensated, financial accountability and steps taken to prevent fraud.

"We are actually, for the first time in anyone's memory here, filing for an extension with the IRS," says Chris Roesner, director of finance at Lollypop Farm, the Humane Society of Greater Rochester (N.Y.).

"We have elected to put off the filing for as long as possible to make sure we have the best new guidance from the IRS, and that our Form 990 is as accurate, and paints us in as good a light, as possible."

Roesner says he has other friends working in the sheltering field in cities like Denver, Detroit, and Miami who are also filing for extensions on the Form 990, so that they can gain a better understanding of how to comply with its expanded requirements.

That's something that Stephen M. Clarke, Form 990 redesign project manager at the IRS in Washington, D.C., is hearing a lot of these days.

"We're in a transition period. Since the Form 990 was redesigned, new questions were added, and other questions were rearranged, so we understand that it's going to take many

organizations a while to adjust to gathering the new information to file a Form 990," says Clarke, who works in the division of the IRS that's responsible for tax-exempt and government entities.

The IRS has received a record number of requests for extensions, Clarke says, pointing to the new form as the likely reason. He expects the number of extension requests to drop next year as organizations adjust.

The previous version of Form 990 was way out of date, according to Clarke; it hadn't been substantially changed since 1979.

"It was mostly a financial report with yes-and-no answers and numbers, so we realized we needed to redesign it to capture a lot more information about organizations, to provide a more complete picture of their activities, their operations, their governance, their transactions, their relationships—to help us and help the public determine whether each organization is organized and operated exclusively for tax-exempt purposes," Clarke says.

Form 990 now consists of an 11-page core form—only two more pages than before—that must be completed by each filer. But it also has 16 accompanying schedules, many of them new. Some of these don't apply to shelters, such as Schedule E for schools and Schedule H for hospitals.

The IRS added one page and a new schedule that gives filers more opportunity to provide explanations and narrative responses to the form's questions.

Major changes include a front-page summary that provides a snapshot of key financial and operating information, a governance section, and revised compensation and related organization reporting.

That all translates to more work for shelter administrators charged with filing the form. They—and, presumably, the certified public accountants that many shelters hire to assist them in this process—are having to dig deeper and provide more detail than in the past.

"There are a lot of questions on how the organization is governed," says Denise Nosek,

vice president and chief financial officer at the Nebraska Humane Society in Omaha.

Form 990 is publicly disclosed information; anyone can ask to see a copy of a tax-exempt organization's filing. And one of the goals of the recent redesign was to increase the form's transparency, making it easier for an outsider to understand the financial workings of nonprofits like shelters.

Nosek approves of the changes, saying that they will prove useful for foundations that want to evaluate the shelter when it goes to apply for various grants.

She added that the new Form 990 isn't necessarily harder; it may, however, take a few days longer to provide all the requested information.

Many shelters are reaching out to CPAs to better grasp the changes to the form. Roesner, though, has found it even more helpful to be a member of the Society of Animal Welfare Administrators (SAWA). He attends its conferences and regularly participates in its listserv. "I can put a question on the listserv, and I can get qualified answers of what my contemporaries are doing within a matter of hours," he says. 

Resources

The new Form 990, schedules, instructions, and related background information are available on the IRS website IRS.gov/eo.

Information on the website includes: a five-page document titled *Background Paper—Summary of Form 990 Redesign Process*; a longer document titled *Background Paper—Form 990, Moving from the Old to the New*; and five mini-course audio programs that provide an overview of the redesigned form and schedules.

Also available on IRS.gov/eo is a one-hour video program, *Tax Talk Today*, which highlights major changes to the form and other helpful hints on how to complete it.



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Who wants to be a millionaire? Barbara Carr's dream came true in July when **Maddie's Fund Pet Rescue Project** awarded shelters and rescue groups in Erie County, N.Y., a \$5 million grant. Carr, the executive director of the SPCA Serving Erie County in Tonawanda, noticed that her shelter's adoption and euthanasia rates were better than a Utah agency that had been awarded a grant and submitted an application on behalf of a



DNY59/ISTOCK

countywide coalition of animal welfare groups and veterinarians, according to *The Buffalo News*. The millions will be paid out in installments and shared with Buffalo Humane Society, City of Buffalo Animal Shelter, HEART Animal Rescue and Adoption Team, The Spay/Neuter Clinic of Western New York, Second Chance Sheltering

Network, and Ten Lives Club. **Lynne Fridley of Maddie's Fund** noted that the grants are difficult to get, and recipients have to show "tangible, life-saving results" as a requirement for renewal. The funds are earmarked for expanding adoption and spay/neuter programs that will ultimately eliminate the euthanasia of all healthy, adoptable cats and dogs in Erie County in five years.

■ **Reducing program.** The pitter-patter of little feet will be much softer in the state of Delaware, thanks to the opening of a high-volume spay/neuter clinic at the Delaware SPCA headquarters in Stanton. In lieu of a ribbon-cutting ceremony, an "unleashing" was held in September for the facility named after longtime supporter Jane Haggard. The shelter is going full-force to reduce euthanasia rates—the rate was cut by 53 percent in 2008, according to a press release, and the new clinic's staff aims to spay or neuter 7,200 animals in the first year of operation. The SPCA was also accepted into Humane Alliance's National Spay/Neuter Response



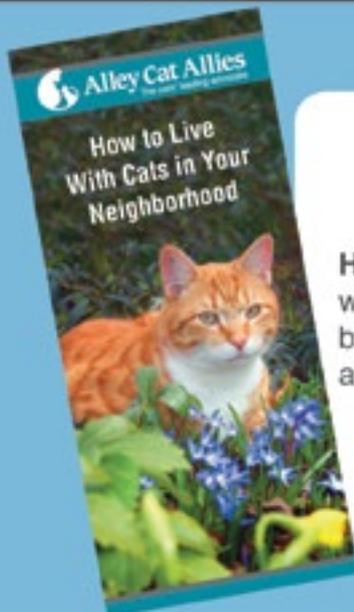
ROBBIE RAFFISH

Board President Willard Crichton and Jane Haggard at the Delaware SPCA's "Unleashing" ceremony.

Team, which provided clinic personnel with training on operating a self-sustaining, high-volume, high-quality, spay/neuter clinic.

■ **Snips and snails and puppy dog tails.** Tail docking, ear cropping, and debarking are no more at **Banfield, The Pet Hospital**, which announced in August that it will no longer perform these procedures on dogs, reports *USA Today*. With more than 730 hospitals and 2,000 veterinarians throughout the U.S.,

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the Portland, Ore., corporation's decision is a significant win in the animal welfare movement's effort to end these purely cosmetic and unnecessary surgeries. Several states, including Illinois, New York, and Vermont, have tried to pass legislation outlawing the procedures, but have been stymied by the **American Kennel Club**, which states they "are acceptable practices integral to defining and preserving breed character and/or enhancing good health." Both the **Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association (HSVMA)** and the **American Veterinary Medical Association** oppose the practices; the HSVMA is also strongly against declawing for cats when it provides no medical benefit for the animal.

Hands down. The electronic billboard overlooking **Times Square** in Manhattan is prime real estate for advertisers, grabbing the attention of thousands of passersby every day. In August, the billboard featured an ad from **The Paw Project**, an anti-declawing group based in **Santa Monica, Calif.** The slogan read, "If You're For Declawing, Raise Your Hand," accompanied by the image of a human hand with the end of every digit cut off. The photo



is an uncomfortable and anatomically correct representation of what the surgery actually is—amputation. The billboard, which was displayed for 10 days in rotation with other ads, has had a tremendous impact, as has the same billboard posted in the heart of West Hollywood, Calif. (above). "Shelters are

requesting posters to display in their lobbies, and owners are calling and e-mailing to say they'll never declaw their cats," says **Jennifer Conrad, D.V.M.**, who founded the organization to educate the public and campaign for anti-declawing legislation. The Paw Project also raises funds for corrective surgery on lions, tigers, and other big cats who have suffered pain and deformity as a result of being declawed. Go to pawproject.org for more information.

Oh, behave! Your own psyche may be a complete mystery to you, but here's a chance to get into the heads of the cats and dogs you care for. **Multnomah County Animal Services in Troutdale, Ore.**, is holding its second annual Masters in Behavior conference in Troutdale **March 6-8**. International experts in animal psychology, welfare, and behavior will hold seminars on feline and canine personality and temperament, behavior assessment, shelter enrichment, kitten adoptions, and other topics designed to reduce stress, increase stimulation, and boost adoptions at your shelter. Go to co.multnomah.or.us/dbscs/pets/ for registration information.

What does a rain cloud wear under his pants? Thunderwear! While you're ROTFL, we want you to know that **thunderwear** is for real ... for dogs. The **Associated Press** reports that capes, unitards, even ear muffs are being touted as alternatives to drugs for easing a pet's anxiety during a thunderstorm. The "**sheep suit**," a snug-fitting coat designed to keep show dogs' coats neat before competition, and the **Anxiety Wrap** employ "hug therapy" to calm a canine, much like a swaddling blanket can calm a fussy baby. Sound-canceling dog ear muffs and **Thunderbands** work along the same principle and have the added benefit of dampening the noise that sets a dog off. The **Storm Defender** cape lined with anti-static fabric supposedly reduces stress by discharging the static electricity in the fur that freaks the dog out. Results are variable, according to comments on a story about the cape at doesitwork.msnbc.com, but many owners agree that wrapping is effective, whether it's done with a fancy commercial product or your old Metallica T-shirt. 🐾

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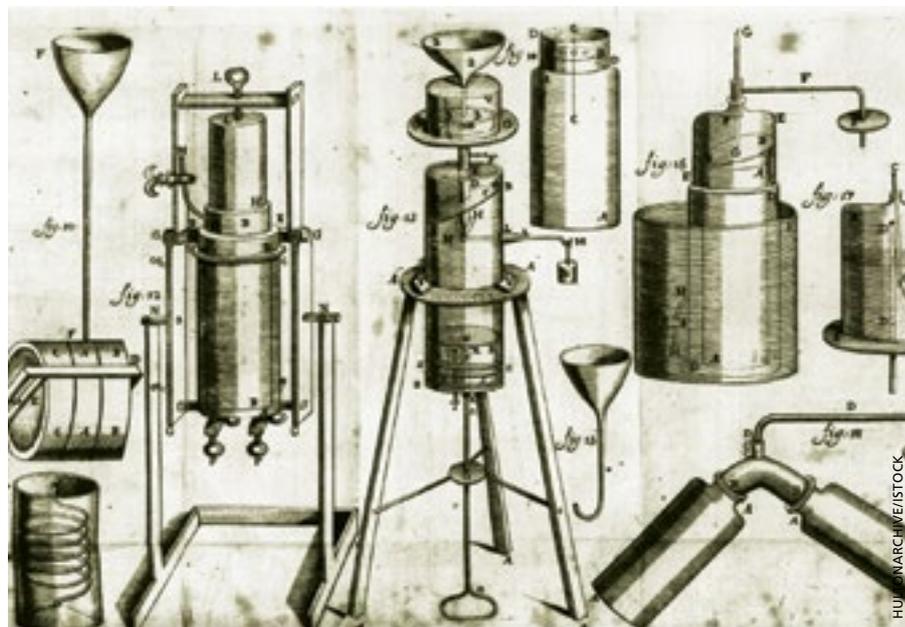
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What gadget, real or imagined, would you most like to have? How would it help you help animals?

That was the question we asked you for this issue's Coffee Break. Many of you wrote of magic wands to neuter animals or make pet owners more responsible—but there were other creative thingamajig ideas, too! For more of them, go to animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak.



I would like a Teflon cat litter box. I am around a lot of cats. I have four cats from the shelter that I volunteer at, which only houses cats and kittens. I work at a veterinarian's office, where I clean and care for cats and kittens. I pet-sit numerous cats in many of my clients' homes. I've tried every cat litter product I can find, cheap and expensive, looking for a litter that could be scooped easily. I've used many different scoopers that didn't make the job much easier. I've also bought various cat litter boxes of various sizes and shapes. Then one day I thought, "What about a Teflon litter box?" Then everything could scoop easily and not stick. I've spoken to several people about this idea, and they didn't think I was crazy!

—Caroline Delgado-Schneider
Grateful Paw Cat Shelter
East Northport, Long Island, New York

Easy for me to answer—I've always wanted to see the day when microchips had a GPS component involved so we could track a lost animal. I think we might see this become a reality one day. Why not? We can track stolen cars this way.

—Leilani Vierra, CEO
Placer SPCA
Roseville, California

How about a Jetsons-inspired, all-in-one animal intake machine? Just drop the animal onto the conveyor belt, and it is bathed, brushed, groomed, vaccinated, and collared before it reaches the awaiting technician on the other end. Shelters could upgrade to the deluxe model that also features a pedicure station and a color-coordinated neckerchief to help them stand out in the crowded adoption room!

—Shelly Simmons, Division Manager
Greenville County Animal Care Services
Greenville, South Carolina

I would love to invent a Kitty Foster Momma. She would be washable, heated to keep kittens warm, have natural nipples for kittens to nurse off of, be refillable with kitten milk replacement and be kept at perfect kitten temperature, and be plush and furry to make them feel more secure. I would love to have a natural cat heartbeat button to turn on to settle upset kittens. This would be an amazing thing to help the numerous abandoned kittens we get every year. Nothing would replace a real momma, but I think it would be worth its weight in gold.

—Tammy Holloway, Director
Marion-Grant County Humane Society
Marion, Indiana

We'd love to have soft, warm beds made of fabric that's totally nonchewable! If a hole were to be made, it would magically close itself, thereby alleviating the need to sweep up fabric scraps and stuffing from an overzealous pup who played with his bed all night instead of sleeping! Then we could keep sewing new beds and not have to repair old ones, plus less time would be spent by kennel staff cleaning up the mess.

—Joan Laisney, coordinator
Kennel Comforters
San Diego, California

I'd like to have a huge crane to lift the top off our building so people could see all the fabulous things we do to help pets every minute of the day. Hopefully, that would keep the donations coming in so we can expand programs and help even more pets.

—Lane Phalen, volunteer
PR Committee Chair
TAILS Humane Society
DeKalb, Illinois

When we have an offsite adoption event and an animal is adopted, we all stop and applaud. The gadget I would love to see is a beautiful bell that would ring throughout Jersey City whenever an animal is adopted. The beautiful sound would let everyone know that an animal now has a permanent, loving home and would bring a smile to their face. Hopefully, it would remind them that adoption is an option and how important animals are to us. They are truly "magic to our ears!"

—Janet Russell, Director of Development
Liberty Humane Society
Jersey City, New Jersey

How about a money tree? Oh, and a machine that instantly transforms irresponsible pet owners into responsible ones.

—Jess Allison, Shelter Manager
Orange County Animal Services
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

It would be remarkable if someone could invent a machine that lets animals talk (similar to the dogs in the movie *Up!*). They could tell us if they're not feeling well, what their favorite food is, if they'd prefer to live in a home with other animals, and what qualities they are looking for in their new family!

—Bethany Kloc, Special Events
Coordinator and Grant Writer
SPCA Serving Erie County
Tonawanda, New York

I would love to have a net with some sort of breakaway capabilities or something that made the transfer of angry cats into cages much easier and lessened the possibility of escape.

—Mary Ellen Wood, Humane Officer
Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA
San Mateo, California

A magic wand to wave over each and every town, village and city that would magically spay and neuter each and every stray, companion, and feral cat ... and if that doesn't work, each and every human that doesn't take the responsibility to spay/neuter and love forever their fur friends.

—Denice M. Martin, Assistant Kennel
Manager/Adoption-admissions Specialist
Finger Lakes SPCA, Inc.
Bath, New York

My gadget is an easily identifiable, brightly colored scarf/bandanna (called a "Look But Don't Touch" scarf) that dogs with "issues" would have attached to their collars when out in public. This scarf would alert other dog guardians at a glance that the approaching dog is uncomfortable with other dogs/people. This would be so helpful for those who are trying to exercise their special-needs dog and avoid those "My dog is friendly" and "My dog isn't" conversations.

—Lora O'Connor, Interim Director
Humane Society of Western Montana
Missoula, Montana

***Animal Sheltering* congratulates Lane Phalen of Illinois, whose submission was selected in a random drawing from those published in this issue. TAILS Humane Society, where she works, will receive a free coffee break: a \$50 gift certificate to a local coffee shop. "Bone" appetit!**

Next question: What is the most heartwarming animal welfare experience you've ever had?

Please submit your responses (150 words or less) at animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak or send them to Editor, *Animal Sheltering*/HSUS, 2100 L St. NW, Washington, DC 20037. **Your answer may be printed in a future issue of *Animal Sheltering*.** If your response is chosen for publication, you will be entered into a drawing to win **a free coffee break (valued at \$50)** for your organization. Responses may be edited for length or clarity; no donation or purchase is necessary to win. See animalsheltering.org for contest rules, or send an e-mail or letter to the above addresses to request a printed copy.

ON THE INSIDE, LOOKING OUT

Prison programs transform inmates as well as animals

BY JAMES HETTINGER

Through the Pen Pals program at San Quentin, dogs help humanize the inmates, while the inmates make the dogs more adoptable.



San Quentin, what good do you think you do? Do you think I'll be different when you're through?

Johnny Cash sang those questions in 1969, recording his hit "San Quentin" live during a concert at the facility that inspired it.

Cash sung that he hated every inch of California's oldest state prison. But these days, some of the jail's residents—and a few lucky dogs—might feel differently about the penitentiary.

It's not that San Quentin's magically become a nice place to be. It's still the largest prison in the state, housing more than 5,000 inmates at the end of 2008. It's home to the state's only death row for male inmates, and the list of those currently housed there includes some of the most notorious and violent felons around. In 2005, a federal judge threatened to strip Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger of his authority over the California prison system unless his administration dealt with ongoing problems at San Quentin and other state correctional facilities; the warden was fired later that year.

But 2005 also saw the beginning of a small, good thing: San Quentin began hosting Pen Pals, a Marin Humane Society (MHS) program that enables some carefully screened inmates to care for and train shelter dogs.

The San Quentin complex is so large that it has its own firehouse, separate from the main prison. Pen Pals dogs share modest rooms above the firehouse with their handlers, who are low-security inmates working as firefighters. Once the dogs complete the program, which typically takes about a month, they return to MHS for adoption.

"To tell you the truth, the firehouse—if you're an inmate in San Quentin or you're a dog—is the best place to be," says Larry Carson, a Marin Humane canine evaluator and the coordinator of the Pen Pals program. "You're basically with somebody almost all the time. You're in a room, you're in a more normal environment. You're getting stimulation, you're getting training, you're not sitting in a run. ... It's a good situation for them."

San Quentin's not the only big house involved in helping ready shelter animals for new homes. Dozens of prisons around the country have teamed up with area shelters and rescue groups to establish similar programs.

Participants say the benefits are mutual, with the rewards outweighing any risks. Shelters acquire precious foster space and willing trainers, saving animals' lives. And progressive prisons, which aim to help convicted criminals become functional citizens—making them less likely to commit crimes again upon release—are witnessing how the calming presence of animals can help.

The programs produce more-adoptable dogs (and, in some cases, cats), as well as people who are better-prepared for life after prison.

"We're both in the rehabilitation business," says Carson. "And hopefully if we do our job and they do their job, everybody comes out ahead."

The prisoners involved in the program will eventually be released, he adds, so society benefits if they have the best possible attitude. "Taking care of dogs and having those responsibilities makes you a better person," he says. "It makes you more human."

The Human Factor

Hardcore crime-and-punishment types might argue that the inmates at these facilities are there because they've already shown themselves to be all *too* human, all *too* prone to indulge the darker elements of human nature.

But people can change—and prisoners aren't the only beneficiaries of these programs. And while Carson acknowledges that some San Quentin staffers initially wondered if the prisoners deserved dogs, and also raised security and health concerns, he says the program has proceeded virtually incident-free. He lists a dog who escaped for a few days as the biggest problem it's encountered.

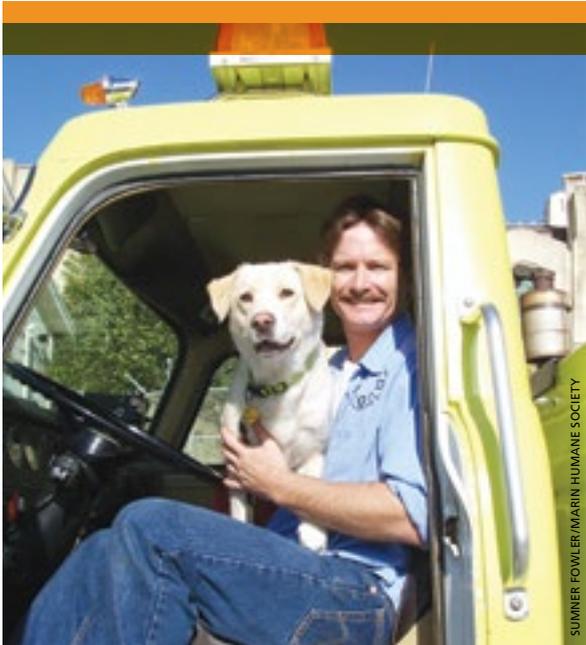
A prison program in Kansas wasn't so fortunate, as two of its participants did a very human thing several years ago—and wound up grabbing national headlines.

In February 2006, Toby Young, founder and director of the Safe Harbor Prison Dog Program at the state-run Lansing Correctional Facility, smuggled convicted murderer John Manard—one of the program's dog handlers—out of jail in a dog crate. Young had reportedly fallen in love with the convict; authorities captured the couple 12 days later as they were leaving a bookstore in Chattanooga, Tenn.

The story proved juicy enough to briefly become a media sensation: Young was a 48-year-old mother and cancer survivor with a failing marriage, while Manard was a 27-year-old serving a life sentence for murder. (Young, who pleaded guilty to giving a firearm to a convicted felon, was released from federal prison in May 2008. Manard was sentenced to 130 months for his role in the escape, and later received an additional 10-year sentence for possessing a firearm.)

The incident turned a harsh media spotlight on Safe Harbor, but it failed to kill the program. Brett Peterson, a Safe Harbor volunteer who works as a policy and compliance officer for the Lansing jail, says officials never considered shuttering Safe Harbor. "I think people see this as something bigger than any one person," he says.

Founded in 2004, Safe Harbor fosters dogs from shelters throughout the Midwest with the roughly 100 Lansing inmates trained as handlers. The handlers do basic dog



Inmate firefighters at San Quentin State Prison in California train and socialize dogs through a partnership with the Marin Humane Society.



In July 2009, inmates Randal Rostron (left) and Richard McPeak (right) at Northpoint Training Center in Kentucky welcomed their new canine companion. When a prison riot broke out later in the summer, inmates involved in the dog training program protected the animals from the violence.

training and provide companionship and care. The program holds adoption events nearly every Saturday at a PetSmart in Shawnee, Kan. Working with the Greater Kansas City Humane Society and local veterinarians, Safe Harbor arranged more than 3,000 spay/neuter surgeries in its first five years of operation, and also makes sure its dogs get the necessary vaccinations and medications, Peterson says.

"The program was not the problem," says Bill Miskell, a spokesman for the Kansas Department of Corrections. The escape sparked a review of security procedures but in no way reflected poorly on Safe Harbor, Miskell says, noting that Safe Harbor's inmate dog trainers learn marketable skills and generally cause fewer disciplinary problems.

As a result of the incident, Safe Harbor has become "hyper-conscious" of security, stepping up its X-ray ability and package-detection procedures, Peterson says. The dogs don't alter the rules; people go through the same security whether they have a dog or not, and a dog's medication is subject to the same package-detection process as a person's lunch. All but one of the Safe Harbor volunteers are prison employees or relatives of prison employees, according to Peterson.

Peterson, who concedes that the immediate aftermath of the escape was "pretty scary," paints a beatific picture of the Safe Harbor program today, noting he can look out his window and see an inmate walking two shelter beagles whose tails are wagging. "It's really pretty peaceful."

The escape by Young and Manard was shocking, embarrassing, and disappointing, Peterson says, but Safe Harbor officials quickly turned their attention to picking up

the pieces. The escape occurred on a Sunday, and by the following Saturday Safe Harbor volunteers had pooled their resources to set up an adoption day at PetSmart.

Dispelling the Doubts

Other groups have also refused to be daunted by the idea of entering prisons and dealing with prisoners.

Terry Henry, executive director of the all-volunteer, nonprofit Paws4people Foundation, says he's often asked whether he has reservations about using inmates to train dogs. "To tell you the truth, the answer is no." To Henry, his organization's prison program—known as Paws4prisons—seems like it was meant to be.

The Paws4prisons program teaches inmates in federal prisons in several Eastern/Mid-Atlantic states to train dogs from breeders, shelters, and rescues. After training, the dogs are adopted to clients who include children with disabilities and veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Henry views the program as a "win" for the inmates, the people who need the dogs, the dogs themselves, and the prison system because the inmates "have a different mindset after they hook up with the veterans and the kids and the dogs." After lifetimes of selfish behavior, many inmates realize the importance of helping other people, Henry says. They also get nonjudgmental, unconditional love from the dogs—which, he notes, is a foreign concept for many inmates.

Founded in 2007, Paws4prisons grew out of the foundation that Henry's daughter, Kyria Henry, started in 1999, when she was 12. Paws4people began with Kyria bringing

dogs to visit nursing homes and hospitals, and later evolved to include dogs working with special-needs students. The Henrys branched out into prisons after Kyria, as a West Virginia University sophomore in 2006, met the new warden at the women's prison in nearby Hazelton, W.Va., who wanted to start a dog program.

The Henrys hesitated at first, but decided to take a chance after doing some Internet research and reading about the Cell Dogs program in Seattle, which claimed a successful seven-year track record.

Paws4prisons works in low-security women's prisons, so its volunteers don't fear for their safety, Henry says. The program frequently refines its process for selecting inmate dog trainers, and has gotten better at choosing those who will succeed, he adds.

The program has a four-tiered application process that includes an interview by Paws4prisons officials and screening by the prison to make sure the candidates have no history of violence or sexual or animal abuse. Selected inmates begin as entry-level trainers and work their way up to become senior trainers—a process that involves academic coursework, tests, and handler evaluations, and takes about two years.

He estimates that about one-third of the applicants either don't get into the program or quickly get weeded out. "Some of them will self-eliminate after the first three months, because they go, 'Man, this is way more than I bargained for.'"

And he cautions that "inmates are inmates," meaning they're good at manipulation and getting what they want—which might be a dog to be around, rather than one they have to train according to the program's protocols.

In such cases, Henry isn't afraid to resort to tough love. He tells the inmates, "You either play by the rules and get into the system, or we'll find somebody else that wants to be here. It's not like we have any trouble filling slots."

If he ever worried about a dog's safety, he says, that dog wouldn't be in the prison, and the inmates involved would no longer be part of the program.

Strong Attachments

Maleah Stringer, co-director of animal care and control in Anderson, Ind., and president of the local Animal Protection League, takes a similar approach at the programs she runs for dogs and cats at Pendleton Correctional Industrial Facility, a state-run prison. The FIDO (Faith + Inmates + Dogs = Opportunity) program for dogs and the 9 Lives program for cats at Pendleton both involve inmates training and socializing animals. "We don't talk about them having 'pets,'" she says. The inmates are expected to view their responsibilities as a job, Stringer says, and if they don't follow the program's rules, they get fired. It's a strict system by necessity.

But for Stringer, the experience has also been an eye-opener. She initially expected to not like the inmates, but was shocked to see how they took proud ownership of the pro-

grams, and how even those who weren't working as handlers wanted to pet the animals and learn their names. She sees the programs teaching the inmates to look beyond themselves, take responsibility, and resolve conflicts nonviolently.

"It has been a life-changing experience for me," she says. "What it's taught me is to try to judge people—not just in prison, but anywhere—as to who they are right now, instead of looking at what they've done and constantly judging."

The humanizing elements of these programs run both ways. In Boyle County, Ky., inmates at Northpoint Training Center, a prison near Danville, quickly embraced a dog-training program that began in July in partnership with the Boyle County Humane Society—so much so that they put themselves at risk to protect the dogs during an August prison riot.

When the rioting started, inmates led the dogs out of their dormitory on leashes, had them lie down, then lay on top of them to protect them from the smoke from the fires



Inmates at Lansing Correctional Facility in Kansas socialize and train dogs like Roxanne through the Safe Harbor Prison Dog Program.

and chemical agents as authorities sought to quell the disturbance, according to an account by the prison.

"The night of the riot, these inmates considered the dogs' safety above their own," says Rita Douglas, a correctional unit administrator for the Kentucky Department of Corrections. "The inmates literally covered the dogs with their own bodies and led them to an area out of harm's way."

Some inmate dog handlers, in written assessments collected for this story by the prison administration, praise the program for giving them responsibility and hope.

Inmate Joseph Burton says the program teaches a marketable skill, provides "a sense of belonging and purpose," and helps the participants feel "a sense of responsibility so you don't lose sight of who you are."

Inmate Lamar Donaldson III says emphatically that he would participate in the program again because "I love what it stands for. Everyone deserves a second chance at life, love and happiness. What it does for us [is] it builds character, and makes you a better person, letting your good light to shine."



Larry Carson of the Marin Humane Society (right) says having shelter dogs handled by inmate firefighters at San Quentin has proved to be a perfect fit.

The program gives shelter dogs a second chance, adds inmate Jontre Fogle, "and I just want to show people that they are good dogs and deserve to be loved and not left at the shelter."

Inmate Kenny Burton says he would take part in the initiative again "because this program has been through a lot in its first run. However, we came out with positive results in the midst of chaos."

Working in a Controlled System

While prison riots are an unusual occurrence, bringing animals into an environment with such serious security issues requires careful planning on the part of any organization considering establishing such a program.

When Carson caught the pilot episode for *Animal Planet's Cell Dogs* show a few years ago, he thought a dog-training program involving inmates would be a perfect fit for Marin Humane, which has a large behavior and training department and is about a 20-minute drive from San Quentin.

He was determined to do it right, and took the time to visit Nevada Humane Society and the Nevada State Prison, which collaborate on a program called Puppies Up for Parole (profiled in *Animal Sheltering* in May-June 2004). "I spent about four hours with the warden at the Nevada State Prison, and he said, 'This is the best program we've ever had here.' He said it's cut down violence by 30 percent in the prison. He said the whole nature of the institution has changed," Carson says.

Carson developed written protocols for MHS using the Nevada program as a model, then pitched the program to San Quentin. The protocols cover such issues as when the dogs can be walked, where they can go in the prison, who can participate, what they're required to do, and who is responsible for the program at both San Quentin and Marin Humane, Carson explains. The shelter had no previous connection to the prison, but San Quentin officials liked the idea.

The legal obstacles were few, he adds, and within a prison's walls, wardens are essentially free to establish whatever program they'd like. "One thing I found out once we started this thing is that prisons are basically little fiefdoms," Carson says. "The warden pretty much controls everything in a prison. So whatever he wants to do—within, of course, the law—he can pretty much do."

Opened in 1852, San Quentin's cells are too small to accommodate dogs, but Carson says the firehouse, which houses about 15 inmate firefighters, is ideal for the Pen Pals program. The rooms are big enough, there's a fenced-in yard, and the dogs are able to lead largely normal lives. The inmates exercise the dogs in the morning, feed them, and are responsible for giving them any medications. By 3 p.m. the inmates are typically done with their jobs—as firefighters and emergency responders on the prison grounds—leaving them free for walks and training.

The prison screens inmates before allowing them to live in the firehouse (they must have a clean behavior record, and



Gidget, a dog in the Safe Harbor Prison Dog Program, relaxes with her handler at Lansing Correctional Facility in Kansas.



Pen Pals dogs have the best spots in the house at San Quentin, sharing rooms above the firehouse with inmates who also serve as firefighters.

no one convicted of a violent crime is permitted), and Marin Humane screens further to make sure the Pen Pals participants have no history of animal, spousal, or child abuse, Carson says.

Marin also screens the dogs it sends to San Quentin, about 60 percent of whom are medical fosters, such as dogs who have been treated for heartworm and need several weeks to recuperate. Another 20 percent are shy dogs who need some one-on-one time, and the final 20 percent are typically adolescent dogs who need behavior training to become good candidates for adoption, Carson explains.

Ideally, the program assigns each dog two inmates—a primary and a secondary handler, Carson says. If the primary handler is running a fire call, the secondary handler takes responsibility for the dog. If both handlers are busy with their jobs, the dog goes back to the room on tie-down or is crated, though they aren't crated for more than two hours and are rarely left unattended for that long, he says. The inmates' rooms have no doors, he explains, so in tie-down situations the dogs are leashed with a five-foot cable within the room. This gives them enough space to lie on their beds, reach their water bowls, and relax outside of their crates.

Carson, along with an instructor and a dog training assistant, visits San Quentin every Tuesday and Thursday to work with the inmates and their dogs. The Pen Pals inmates, who must have a high school diploma or GED, keep a daily log of their dogs' activities, which helps the MHS staff identify issues that need to be addressed.

The medical fosters return to MHS when they're fully recuperated. For the dogs with behavior issues, Carson determines when they're ready to come back; many take a Canine Good Citizenship Test, and after they pass, their certificate is posted on their cage in the shelter to catch the eye of potential adopters.

San Quentin, what good do you think you do?

Do you think I'll be different when you're through?

For some inmates—and the dogs they work with—the answer to Cash's accusing questions is yes.

The Pen Pals program teaches the prisoners' responsibility and helps boost their self-esteem, Carson asserts. "They take a dog that basically knows nothing when they get there, or is sick. And then, through nurturing, through training, they see that dog become healthy, become trained, and then go to a family in the community as a loving pet," he says. "It also gives them a connection with the outside community. Not only do we come in twice a week, but they realize that they're doing something positive with their time there."

Pen Pals has been a tremendous addition to Marin Humane's foster program, Carson says, noting that the shelter can now treat dogs who need a long recuperation period. And the San Quentin training makes dogs more adoptable, he adds. As of late September, 129 dogs had gone through the program, including about 16 who got adopted by San Quentin staff.

The initiative has cost cash-strapped California nothing; MHS foots the bill through grants and donations—a formula Carson recommends for any shelter trying to convince a prison to agree to a jailhouse dog program. The Pen Pals program has an annual budget of about \$12,000, which covers the cost of veterinary care and transport, plus items including food, toys, leashes, harnesses, treat bags, crates, and dog beds. The program also supplies training books, laundry detergent for dog towels and bedding, and cleaning materials for the rooms. The trainers and instructors work as volunteers.

Marin Humane helped start a similar program at a prison in Susanville, Calif., and Carson says he's willing to extend a helping hand to others as well. He hasn't encountered any forward-thinking prison facilities that oppose the concept. "Even if they don't know a lot about behavior training and the intricacies of the dog world," he says, "they understand what that animal connection does to a person." **AS**

To read about a project in Pennsylvania that helps juvenile offenders develop better attitudes toward animals, go to animalsheltering.org/wider_horizons.

Resources

- Larry Carson is willing to show interested organizations how the Marin Humane Society's Pen Pals program is structured and how to develop written protocols. E-mail him at lcarson@marinhumanesociety.org.
- More information about the Paws4people Foundation (including the Paws4prisons program and its marketing arm, SlammerDogz) is available at paws4people.org.
- A video on the FIDO program in Indiana is available on the Animal Protection League website at inapl.org.



MAKING IT WORK

Formalizing your volunteer program is worth the effort

BY AMBER VAN LEUKEN

Trust us!

Volunteers. They're more trouble than they're worth!

That's what I remember thinking one day back in 2008, as I set a pile of scribbled notes on the counter, returned a batch of unused vaccines to the refrigerator, and made my way to the front office.

The task interrupting my busy day was to welcome a kind soul to our animal shelter and orient her to our volunteer program. This was how we used to do orientations: Drop everything, provide a quick, on-the-run spiel as we walked the newcomer through the facility: "Dogs go here, cats go here; here are the sink, brushes, and leashes; be careful to wash your hands; don't let the dogs fight; good luck," and then let the new volunteer sink or swim.

I was the Ark-Valley Humane Society's assistant manager at the time—and I knew better. If we made some changes, got a bit more organized, and trained our volunteers more thoroughly, there was no doubt in my mind that we'd improve volunteer retention, cut down on staff interruptions, and reduce the nagging worry about volunteers getting bitten—which we felt every time a new volunteer picked up a leash or opened a kennel door.

But where should we start?

We knew we didn't need to reinvent the wheel. But it took a while before we committed to change and sat down to hammer out a new direction. I teamed up with the shelter manager and two longstanding volunteers who were also board members. Our goal was to revamp the volunteer program.

There are plenty of great resources that give information about how to structure a basic volunteer program for an animal shelter. *Animal Sheltering's* website, animalsheltering.org, includes numerous articles on volunteer management in its resource library, and the book *Volunteer Management for Animal Care Organizations*, by Betsy McFarland, senior director of the Companion Animals section of The HSUS, is available in PDF format at humanesociety.org. Using some of the guidelines we found there, we strove to address our shelter's specific challenges.

Building a Program that Fits

Our humane society is located in Buena Vista, Colo., and serves our rural county of about 16,000 residents. It inhabits a plain green building with a dirt parking lot and a welcoming flower garden. Surrounded by an industrial park and open fields, the building sits on a flat valley expanse. The Colorado Rockies make for a dramatic backdrop; there are breathtaking views of snowcapped peaks from every dog exercise yard. The stark juxtaposition of natural beauty with chain-link fencing encircling the daily drama of homeless pets is poignant.

It's been a balancing act for us, but even though we accept impounds from Chaffee County, our shelter has been able to maintain a no-kill policy. The shelter also takes in owner-surrendered animals as space allows. Of the 695 animals cared for last year, more than 90 percent were either returned to their owners or were adopted into homes. Only a small percentage was euthanized as a result of serious health or aggression problems.

In a small town, you get used to taking the volunteers you get. The idea of molding a volunteer workforce that would fit our shelter's needs, rather than making do with whoever walked in the door each day, was a daunting task. But what we discovered was that we could require more structure and training for our volunteers, as long as we continued to encourage people to employ their own talents and be creative in the ways they help the animals.

As a limited-admission facility, our shelter has the specific challenge of caring for the animals we take in until they get adopted—no matter how long that takes. While the average stay at the shelter is a month, some animals live at the shelter for the better part of a year.

A year is a long time, but for the animals in our care a loving home is well worth the wait. Since the animals may be with us a while, ensuring a high quality of life is of utmost importance. Dogs sleep with thick blankets and toys. They're paired off or grouped with buddies and play in large yards at least four times each day. Cats snuggle in

Structuring Volunteer Programs



Taylor Gibb, a volunteer at the Ark-Valley Humane Society, spends some cuddle time with Faye. Shelter cats thrive when they get some one-on-one time every day.

soft beds in private or shared kennels and are rotated into a playroom with roosts and a windowsill that gets sunshine 330 days a year.

For some animals, though, that's not enough. The longer an animal stays at the shelter, the more that cat or dog needs extra care. For some animals that means staying at a foster home, or taking a mountain hike with a volunteer instead of a short walk around the shelter. It may mean more cuddle time, or advanced obedience training to keep their minds engaged.

But being a no-kill shelter also has benefits for volunteers. No one has to worry that an animal might be euthanized due to time or space constraints. As a result, the idea of volunteering is more attractive to some self-described "softies," and the potential for daily heartache is replaced with the feeling that it's OK to get attached. Meaningful staff and volunteer connections with each animal ensure that our pets receive excellent care.

Design for Living

Creating volunteer training and opportunities that would best support these human-animal bonds became a guiding goal for us as we started hashing out a volunteer handbook. (*Animalsheltering.org* came in handy here, too; a search for "volunteer handbook" on the site brings up a handful of shelter handbooks in use across the country).

Composing a handbook specific to our organization was a tall order. But, in following a basic outline and putting our programs, policies, history, mission, and goals on paper, we answered a lot of questions ahead of time.

Going through this process helped us get clear on what we wanted the volunteers to know about how the shelter works and how they can best help the animals. With the handbook in place, staff and volunteers would, for the first time, have a shared reference point.

We then took a big leap and changed our volunteer orientations from brief, rushed overviews to scheduled group training sessions. We decided that if someone wanted to volunteer, he'd need to sign up and come back later for training and orientation. We worried: Was this too much to ask? It felt like we could be turning away help as it walked through the door. At what cost?

Not everyone who decides to volunteer at a shelter wants to commit to orientations and scheduled days and times. We wondered how we could stick to our principles and create a more organized and safe program without turning away those who just wanted to visit with the animals or give a dog a quick walk. The last thing we wanted to do was alienate potential helpers—and in fact, we figured, the same people who were too busy to commit to our program's current requirements might be potential or past adopters—or donors—and might make excellent volunteers in the future. We didn't want people who'd showed up to help find us to be overly strict or ungrateful, so even as we increased our rules and regulations, we made an effort to remain flexible and appreciative in our interactions with potential volunteers.

We decided that prospective volunteers, like any visitors to the shelter, should be encouraged to interact with the pets for adoption. Like prospective adopters, spur-of-the-moment helpers are permitted to pet cats, cuddle with



Janet Sellers, a volunteer at the Ark-Valley Humane Society, makes friends with shelter cat Sketchers.

dogs, or take a dog for a walk near the building under routine staff supervision. The oversight allows staff to answer questions and explain the volunteer program's opportunities and training requirements while we have a captive audience. We've found this flexibility works: Once the animals work their magic on the prospective volunteers, they're encouraged to sign up for an orientation to become official volunteers. Those who return do so feeling valued. Those who just dropped by still leave with a good feeling, knowing they've helped to brighten the day for a few animals.

Getting Down and Dirty

Those people willing to commit to our volunteer requirements now attend a structured orientation. By providing it, we're able to ensure that every volunteer starts with an education about our shelter's history, programs, and policies; how to handle animals and improve their well-being through touch and exercise; how to report any problems, avoid spreading diseases, prevent accidents and bites; and whom to ask for help.

We decided that if we made orientations very "hands on," they'd be less boring and a lot more informative. So now, after new folks attend a walking tour of the building and get all the basic spatial and policy information, the new volunteers who plan to work with the animals actually get their hands dirty.

It takes time. For example, each cat volunteer is shown how to pick up and carry a cat, and then must demonstrate a basic proficiency doing it themselves. They need to show that they know how to open and lock kennel doors and sign off on their time with an animal on the appropriate dry erase board.

For dog volunteers, orientation is a lengthy—and, if the dogs are excited, loud—process that involves learning the proper technique for entering kennels, fitting a Gentle Leader harness on a somewhat hyper dog, and learning to check the halls for other dogs and walkers before going through doorways (so as to avoid potential run-ins between less dog-friendly dogs).

This is a lot of work, but well worth it. Most volunteers leave feeling confident enough to return to the shelter and start working without having to ask a million questions. Just as importantly, they feel needed because they've been formally invited to connect with the heart and soul of these animals and their shelter.

Special Projects

We've found that providing specific pet projects is a great way to get volunteers involved and keep them coming back. For some people, the thought of walking 15 dogs in a few hours is overwhelming, not to mention emotionally and physically taxing.

But how about spending a calm hour with old Maggie? She's been at the shelter for six months. A lab mix, white

around her muzzle with a vague cataract haze in her right eye, Maggie would really benefit from some extended care.

Volunteers who once would have been walking a whole string of dogs can now spend quality one-on-one time with animals like Maggie, who barks twice and dances on her front legs when she gets a visitor. Even though she's older, she's nervous and excited, and volunteers learn from her kennel card that she has a tendency toward separation anxiety. They'll get to spend time with her and learn what a special dog she is—and they can help find her a stable, calm, and loving home by making her their pet project.

When a volunteer has a pet project, they take extra time to help out one or two special animals of their choice until those animals find homes. For dogs, the extra time can include grooming, long walks, visits to the park while sporting a snazzy "adopt-me" vest, overnights at the volunteer's home, or obedience lessons with the volunteer. Volunteers will often post fliers featuring their special pet to entice potential adopters, sponsor adoption fees, write an article about the pet for the local paper, and add detailed personal observations to the generic pet description on the shelter's website. For each volunteer who invests in the animal's care, the pet's eventual adoption is an especially tangible and emotionally rewarding event.

For a different volunteer, of course, walking 15 dogs is just the challenge he needs to get in great shape for an upcoming marathon. A well-trained volunteer can jog with three friendly dogs at once, and everyone involved will get a great workout—for dogs, nothing beats a jog away from the sights and sounds of the shelter. The air is always sweeter down the road.

And occasionally a volunteer's special talent comes in handy. A gentleman certified in Reiki, a technique for re-

Matching dogs with play buddies is a great way to improve their quality of life while at the shelter. Here, two dogs enjoy each other's company at the Ark-Valley Humane Society.



AMBER VAN LEUKEN/ARK-VALLEY HUMANE SOCIETY

Structuring Volunteer Programs



Hayden Gibb, a volunteer at the Ark-Valley Humane Society in Buena Vista, Colo., takes Miss Madeline for a walk. Teaching puppies about leash walking gives them skills that adopters appreciate.

laxation and stress reduction, works with timid cats who arrive at the shelter. Some of these kitties are teetering on the verge of a “feral cat” designation, but this volunteer’s efforts sometimes make the difference between a particular cat getting a placed on someone’s lap or placed on a hay bale upon adoption.

Groomers, of course, are great to have as volunteers—perfect to call on when a matted, small-breed, “Is there a poodle under here somewhere?” dog arrives. A local dog trainer might be open to volunteering her services to include a free consultation for new adopters, resulting in fewer dog returns and a boost in her business.

And a dedicated volunteer with a green thumb can do a lot to enhance a shelter’s entrance with pretty landscaping.

And That Has Made All the Difference

When volunteers show up, help out, and fit in, our staff rejoice. Our hope is that by making a commitment to formal training for volunteers, and remaining open to their input, the volunteer-induced headaches we experienced in the past will remain in the past.

We noticed that existing volunteers who graciously attended the new orientation and training seminar saw that their work was appreciated by staff and the board of directors. As one board member noted, “I think the new orientation program is a tonic to longtime volunteers—they see the investment and know they are valued.” The feedback from longtime volunteers also helped shape successive orientations. New volunteers have shown greater confidence and a stronger sense of dedication to their work. They’re more competent and committed overall, and as a result, our staff has developed greater trust and appreciation for volunteers.

The benefits of well-trained volunteers are, in theory, endless. They’re great to call in a pinch when an employee phones in sick first thing in the morning. Who else would arrive with a smile to scrub cat kennels for two hours on short notice?

Good volunteers stand out and make an excellent pool of applicants when a job or board of directors position opens up. Most importantly, they invaluablely enrich the lives of the animals they help care for.

I admit that as an employee, I didn’t always look a new volunteer in the face and see myself looking back. But I should have. Years ago, while in college, I walked dogs as a volunteer for my local animal shelter. Unbeknownst to me, I had already started my career in animal welfare. Shelters that take the time and make the effort to train volunteers may be creating lifelong advocates.

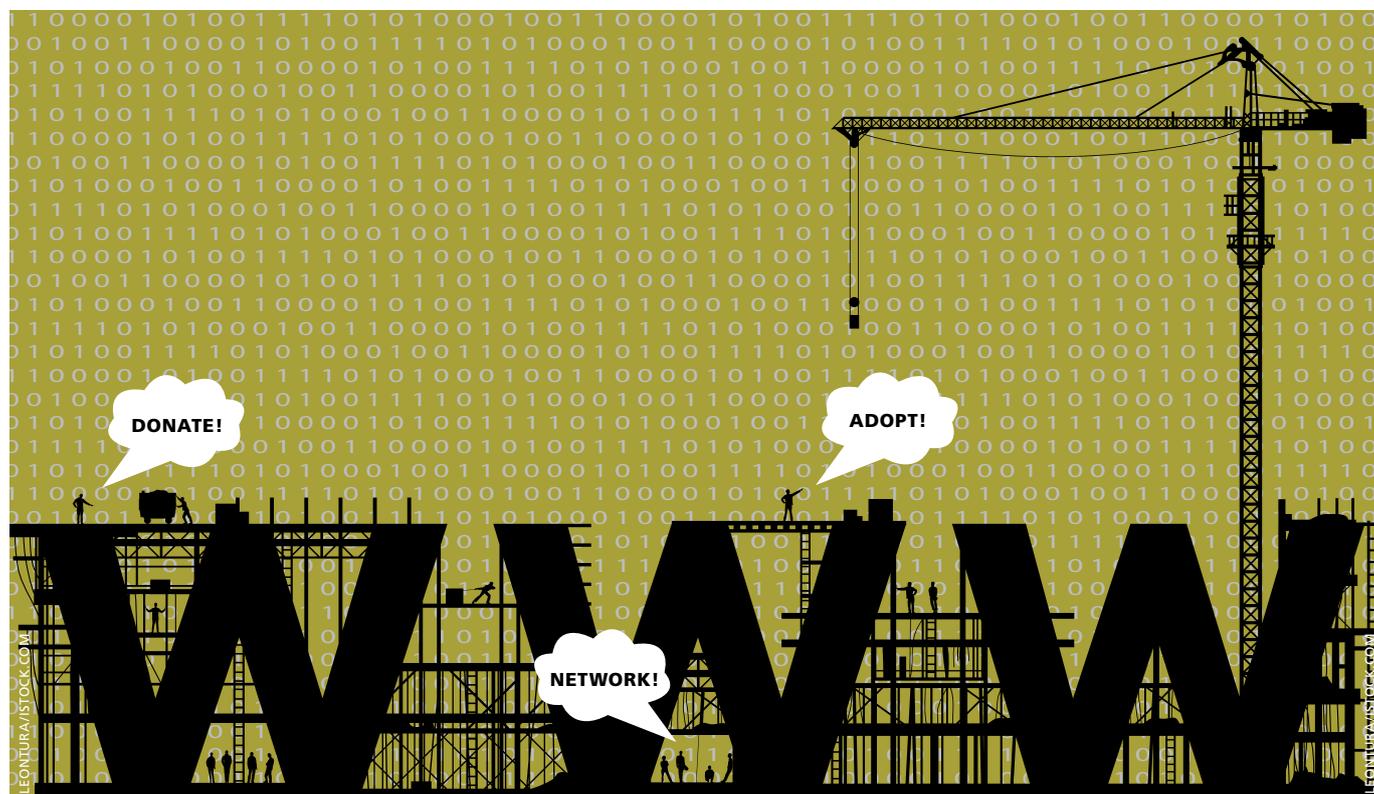
I’m hopeful that our efforts have been a worthwhile investment in our shelter’s future. If we’re lucky, there will be a lot more dependable shoulders around to help us carry the burden and share the joys of our seemingly endless work. [AS](#)



Keys to a Cool Shelter Website

Amazing new tools to engage people, create community, and support your mission

BY JIM BAKER



It's irresistible.

Click over to a website the Greenville (S.C.) Humane Society launched last fall to educate the public about the pet overpopulation problem. Up comes a deceptively standard-looking page listing some alarming statistics, as well as the benefits of spaying and neutering your pets.

Then, from every corner, appear rambunctious kittens, one after another, careening into the text, clawing at the pictures, turning the neatly designed page into a mess—and showing what happens when people don't neuter.

Or visit the Oregon Humane Society's website and click the "Donate" button. You can honor a loved one by selecting and sending them a tribute card and designating a gift to the shelter on their behalf. This feature alone brings in about \$85,000 a year.

Or check out the website of the SPCA of Wake County (N.C.), which runs the nitty-gritty of its volunteer program—filling spots in orientation sessions, gathering contact information, getting people signed up for shifts—electronically, greatly reducing paperwork and back-and-forth phone calls.

No longer is the typical shelter website a static, digital brochure featuring a "just the facts, ma'am" approach, a homemade appearance, and the barest hint of interactivity (that being an adoptable animals search function, updated every few weeks at best).

These days, the trend is clearly toward websites that are sleekly professional and guided by the principles of ease of use, clarity, interactivity, and site-visitor engagement.

Thanks to the Internet, people are conducting more and more aspects of their lives online: shopping, socializing, doing busi-

ness—and that goes for seeking a new pet, too. That's why it's rapidly becoming essential for private shelters, as well as animal care and control agencies, to have an online presence. The public expects an organization to have a website, where they can pay a quick, virtual visit to find out if you have what they need—whatever that good or service might be.

An effective website can project your organization into cyberspace, serving as your voice, your identity, and one of your most valuable marketing tools. It can communicate your mission, provide detailed information, and, of course, give people a look at all the potential new best friends available at your shelter.

Not only that, but many shelters are finding that their websites, with the addition of some interactive features, are a tremendous boon to their donations, adoptions, and volunteer programs.

Ask essential questions such as “Why do people visit this site?” “When they do, what are they looking for?” and “What would help the site be visited more frequently?” and then make the information easily accessible.

Shelters that have committed the resources and done the hard work that goes into creating knock-your-socks-off websites often identify the same approaches and tools as being the keys to their online success.

Here, some of them share their insights on the key elements of a strong online presence, explaining how their own sites have helped them in their mission to help animals.



A Good Site is Easy and Fun to Use

Ease of use should be a guiding principle for any website designed to engage the public.

“Always consider visitor perspective when planning and developing [a site],” says David Avila, account manager at All City Web & Print, in Longmont, Colo. His firm redesigned the Longmont Humane Society’s website, pro bono. “If the site is not user friendly, users will abandon it quickly after arriving and/or not return. Ask essential questions such as ‘Why do people visit this site?’ ‘When they do, what are they looking for?’ and ‘What would help the site be visited more frequently?’ and then make the information easily accessible.”

An effective shelter website will provide quick, easy access to information that a visitor in a hurry might be looking for—the shelter’s phone number, hours, and location, for example, should be easy to find. Some sites put this information in one area (a page labeled “About Us” or “Contact Information,” for instance). Others ensure it’s always at hand by placing the organization’s phone number and address at the top or bottom of every page on the site. Some, in fact, do both.

Such basics ensure that a harried client won’t be frustrated. Someone who has lost her cat doesn’t want to spend 15 minutes trying to figure out how to call the shelter.

But a good website is also joy to navigate, providing folks with more time with a place to explore and a way to learn more about the organization and its work. Achieving this quality is a big challenge; the easier a website is to use, the more likely it is that tons of thought and planning went into designing it.

Adrian Goh, a Ph.D. student in organizational science at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte, has studied the qualities that make shelter websites effective. He points to the website of the San Francisco SPCA as a good example of customer-friendly Web design. “They have a very easy, clean interface, there’s not a lot of distraction, there’s a main focus point. You have drop-down menus at the top bar that will help just about any visitor navigate.”

The key here is to shoot for a clean, uncluttered look, rather than a wall of content. “You don’t want to overwhelm [visitors], but at the same time, you want to provide the general frame.”

Model approaches:

- The San Francisco SPCA: sfspca.org
- The Longmont Humane Society: longmonthumane.org



A Good Site is Highly Functional

A good shelter website has the potential to make your life—as well as the participation of adopters, donors, and supporters—much easier, because you can design it to do so many things. People can use it to buy a ticket to an upcoming event, donate to various funds, grab content from your site (such as a profile/photo of a particularly charming kitten) and share it with friends on Facebook and Twitter, join your volunteer program, register for your e-newsletter, print out adoption forms, license their pets—you name it.

The SPCA of Wake County in Raleigh, N.C., for example, has transferred much of the cumbersome administrative work required to run its volunteer program onto its website. A website-management software suite from Convio—a company that specializes in technology for nonprofits—has saved staff tons of time. “Before, with our old website, once you clicked a link that said, ‘I want to be a volunteer,’ you had to call or e-mail our volunteer services manager, so she spent much of her time just responding to people that were interested in attending an orientation,” says Mondy Lamb, marketing director at the shelter. Now, site visitors can click on a calendar that shows when volunteer orientations are scheduled, and sign themselves up for one. The volunteer services coordinator can print out a report tracking attendees, including their contact information. If a particular orientation is full, it automatically closes out online, and people are directed to another date. In similar fashion, site visitors can

use the same calendar to sign up for a pet-loss support group, or register to participate in an event, like the shelter's "Howl-O-Ween" celebration.

Model approaches:

- The SPCA of Wake County:
spcawake.org
- Wayside Waifs: waysidewaifs.org
- The Placer SPCA: placerspca.org



A Good Site Makes it Easy to Donate

Shelters have always relied on the kindness of strangers. Their websites are often the first way to reach potential donors—and yet, some shelters don't have a donation function in their websites, and others hide donor opportunities deep in the site labyrinth, as though they want to make sure only the geekiest and most persistent will ever be able to give their dollars to the animals.

Don't make your supporters work that hard. These days, incorporating online donations into your site's functionality is easy. A variety of online payment services enable people to make donations on your website, while maintaining the privacy and security of their financial information. PayPal is probably the most familiar of these services, but there are others, such as Network for Good, Acceptiva, Click & Pledge, and DonorPerfect. These four, in fact, are tailored specifically to meet the needs of nonprofits.

You can incorporate a design element, such as a box that says "Make a Donation," into your site that appears just about on every page view. Some shelters put such a box or button in a column running down one side of the page, or in a banner across the bottom or top of the site.

And give site visitors options: Your donation page can have information about general donations, those in honor or memory of a particular person or pet, bequests and estates, event sponsorship, individual pet sponsorship, a wish list, a fund for shelter pets with special needs, even car donations. Visitors to the website of Wayside Waifs in Kansas City, Mo., will find links for all of these options located on a "Donate" landing page.

Model approaches:

- The SPCA Located in Lakeland:
lovemyspca.com
- The Longmont Humane Society:
longmonthumane.org
- Wayside Waifs: waysidewaifs.org
- The Oregon Humane Society:
oregonhumane.org

A Good Site Will Help Visitors Search for Pets

Shelter webmasters who track where their visitors go report that the No. 1 destination on the shelter's website is typically the adoptable animal search. In fact, many visitors click right past a shelter's homepage to see what animals are available. Some visitors even follow a particular pet's journey through a shelter, checking back in to see if an animal is listed as adopted, placed in foster care, or transferred to a different location (such as a satellite adoption center).

In many cases, the adoptable pet search is what drives traffic to a shelter's website. It certainly does in Oregon: "There are people who, when they have a 15-minute break at work, they go online, and they look at our animals available for adoption, and they e-mail their friends, and it's a whole social circle that revolves all over Portland, following this website," says Barbara Bagnon, OHS's public relations/marketing director.

Featuring an adoptable pet search on a shelter website is nothing new; that tool's been around for a while. But now there are software systems that automatically update an animal's status in real time (or every hour or half hour). This means that as soon as staff members enter an adoptable pet into the shelter's internal tracking/management software, the animal appears on the online pet search—and if that animal gets adopted, the listing will come down. This way, people don't come to a shelter to see a specific pet

Whipping Up a Website—On the Cheap

Clearly, most small shelters around the country can't afford to create websites with the look and features of sites operated by big shelters that have multimillion-dollar budgets.

But it's possible even for shelters and city/county agencies on a shoestring budget to create a basic website, page, or blog—with a minimal amount of expense and technical savvy.

Sometimes, the funds and expertise to create a website can land right in your lap. Local marketing firms with web expertise are often looking to take on a pro bono client, typically a nonprofit organization in the community. It's worth it to reach out to such firms in your region.

Another approach is to apply for grants from community foundations, seeking funds to launch a basic website.

You might have a resource of technical know-how right under nose: your volunteers. Many people these days, especially high school and college students, are versed in website design and could give you the tools to get you started.

And if you're willing to try the do-it-yourself method, there are plenty of places online that can help you accomplish the task, such as web.com, sitecube.com, and BuildYourSite.com.

There are also sites that offer free blogger templates, and blogger-specific tutorials, so you can create a blog for your shelter. Check out btemplates.com, bloggerbuster.com, and blogger.com, a free blog publishing tool from Google.

listed in the search, only to find out the animal's already been adopted.

In some cases, when websites are equipped with this type of search, site visitors who browse adoptable pets are actually looking at images of animals that have been uploaded to a remotely hosted pet adoption site like Petfinder, or the newer Petango, but the interface keeps the viewer on the shelter's own website throughout the experience. This neat trick is accomplished by a simple bit of embedded software code.

At the SPCA Serving Wake County, "We survey everybody that adopts: 'How did you hear about us? What made you come down here today?' And 95 percent of them say, 'I visited your website, I saw this picture of the animal online,'" says Lamb. "That's step one: a real-time adoption database."

Model approaches:

- The SPCA of Wake County: spcawake.org

A Good Site Will Take Advantage of Social Networking

Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube and other social networking/content-sharing sites aren't only revolutionizing the media, they're also changing the landscape for nonprofits. Webmasters and other staff members say that incorporating these tools into your website is surprisingly easy, and they serve a number of important purposes, such as creating a sense of community, attracting new supporters, and offering an effective way to spread the word about what your shelter's doing. If you check

Animal Control Adapts to Internet-Age Expectations

The days when animal care and control agencies could carry out their mission with just a bare-bones website offering minimal functionality and the slightest online identity are over. At least that's how Mike Oswald feels.

"We're an urban animal services program, and we're full-service, and what we've discovered is that in this day and age, people expect to have their needs met electronically, using the Internet and the Web," says Oswald, director of Multnomah County Animal Services in Portland, Ore.

That's why his agency, in addition to offering the basics like an adoptable pet search with photos, lost-and-found services, and information about ordinances, has enhanced its site with all kinds of new content and dynamic features.

Staff have added success stories of adopted pets; links to press releases about various events and issues in the media; kitty and doggy cams; videos about pet care and training taken from episodes of a community cable TV show the agency produces, posted to YouTube; the ability to process donations; a pet license lookup feature, so people can track down a stray pet's owner; and they're even experimenting with Facebook and Twitter.

"Whether they're private shelters or public shelters, I think the trend is to be more accessible, and the public's simply more sophisticated when it comes to the Internet and what they expect from the Web," Oswald says.

The online revolution that has reshaped so much of the way people interact, conduct business, and seek information has altered the landscape for animal control agencies, too.

When Peggy Bender started her job as community relations and education specialist at Fort Wayne Animal Care and Control in Indiana, there were no computers in the office; everything was handwritten, in triplicate.

Twenty-five years later, one of her many tasks is to oversee the agency's website, which includes shooting "Pet Wise" video clips about various aspects of pet ownership.

The agency's online presence is housed within the larger City of Fort Wayne website, with each city department using the same basic template design. Within the template's limits, Bender can easily update and change the shelter's pages.

Unlike many municipal or county agencies, Bender's shelter has purchased its own domain name, so that people don't have to click through the City of Fort Wayne website, looking for the link to animal control. The domain name is short and sweet—the

agency's initials—and Bender makes sure it appears on all the department's printed materials. It's even plastered on the staff's government vehicles.

Her agency's Web pages attract 55,000 to 65,000 hits per month, most of them going to the adoptable pet search—which is why Bender insists that photos of pets be high-quality. That means pictures that clearly show the eyes and expressions of the animals, and a cozy setting, complete with toys or blankets. Photos of a stressed-out cat, pressed against the back of a stainless steel cage, hold little appeal to site visitors.

"You've got your people who are really just looking for pets, and boy, I'll tell you, they are looking at those pets every day ... so spending the time to put quality photos and video on your site is so worthwhile," she says.

If an animal care and control facility is going to invest the effort to do a website, its hallmark should be quality.

"It has to be professional, it has to be current, it has to be engaging, useful information—all that has to be considered in any kind of marketing that you are doing," Bender says. "That website is your voice."

Model approaches:

- Multnomah County Animal Control: multnomah.or.us/dbcs/pets/
- Fort Wayne Animal Care & Control: fwacc.org

out various shelter websites today, you're likely to see more of those Facebook and Twitter icons populating their homepages.

Wayside Waifs in Kansas City has jumped on the social networking bandwagon. Visitors to its website can follow the shelter's events, activities, and adoption promotions on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, as well as on a frequently updated blog. At press time, the shelter had nearly 3,000 followers on Facebook and about 2,000 on Twitter.

What's the shelter doing on those sites to attract all that interest? On its Facebook group page, there's news about upcoming events and promotions, videos of adoptable pets, photo albums with pictures from past activities, answers to questions posted by followers ("Will Wayside Waifs be at Dogtoberfest on Sunday?"), and more.

On Twitter, meanwhile, staff members are posting brief "tweets" about adoption specials ("Looking for BIG LOVE? Adopt a BIG DOG at Wayside!"), fundraisers, upcoming media spots about the shelter, and links to videos and other content.

"None of [the social networking sites] alone would be sufficient to move the needle on donations or adoptions, but all of them working together are kind of spokes on the wheel," says Marla Svoboda, director of development. They work in concert with the shelter's TV advertising, direct mail, and the website to give Wayside Waifs a strong identity in the community.

Goh has looked into how websites can make volunteer programs more effective and appealing. Social networking, he says, is an increasingly popular way for people to feel a sense of belonging. In fact, some people seem to feel closer to their online friends than to those they interact with in person. The trend these days is toward people leading more solitary lives, while at the same time shifting to more online friendships. "Shelters need to be a part of that," Goh says. "What shelters can do is create a Facebook group or have a Twitter channel where people could just tweet about what's going on with the shelter." Twitter especially, he says, meets the need people have today for instant information and instant gratification. "People are really taking to it. It's even becoming a way for news organizations to start giving you news."

Model approaches:

- Wayside Waifs: waysidewaifs.org



Bringing New Tools to Bear

These days, the Web is the primary medium for people's interactions with the world, and having a website that reflects the compassion and professionalism of your organization can go a long way toward improving public perception of your agency. These five points just scratch the surface of the qualities and capabilities that the Web can give to shelters.

Other key elements include:

- Having online registration for your e-newsletter, so you can capture people's contact information and build a database of supporters
- Posting high-quality pictures of your adoptable animals
- Making it as easy as possible for the media to cover you by providing them with your own content, such as videos.

Animal welfare organizations really need to use these new modes of messaging in the communities they serve, says Lamb. And the way to do this is to develop dynamic, content-rich websites that give people a relevant source of information and become a destination site for them.

"Other nonprofits are using powerful [software] tools to motivate people and to influence their behavior," says Lamb. "And if our goal ... is to ultimately change the way society treats animals, I think we have to turn to these more sophisticated messaging tools." 

 An advertisement for Petfinder.com. The top half features the Petfinder logo in a stylized blue font, followed by the tagline "Looking out for you, looking out for your adopters". Below this is a list of four bullet points:

- Petfinder.com is the leading household name in pet adoption
- 5.2 Million unique visitors each month
- Partnered with PETFIRST® Pet Insurance
- Only \$5 for the first month of insurance
- NO age limitations young or old!

 A large, close-up photograph of a brown dog's face occupies the right side of the advertisement.

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A Crisis in Customer Service? Not So Much

A secret shopper program finds plenty to purr about—and some room for improvements



Last summer, Maddie's Fund and Petfinder worked together to put the sheltering and rescue field to the test via a series of phone calls, e-mails, and site visits. Their quest? To find out whether there is truly a crisis in customer service in our line of work, and to reward the groups that put their best feet—and their best paws—forward. Over the course of 10 weeks, Petfinder Foundation staff “secret shopped” a series of rescues and shelters selected at random from *Petfinder.com* member groups. They awarded those organizations whose staff and volunteers performed well with a total of \$50,000.

In a series of interviews excerpted here, *Animal Sheltering* editor Carrie Allan talked to Richard Avanzino, president of Maddie's Fund; Kim Saunders, *Petfinder.com* vice president for shelter outreach; and executive director Liz Neuschatz and program manager Lisa Robinson of the Petfinder Foundation about why they invested time and money in the project, what they found, and what they hope to do next.

Animal Sheltering: Why did Petfinder think this was an important program to do?

Kim Saunders: We've been working for a long time to come up with creative ways to encourage groups to improve their customer service. We all know why.

Have you had particular reports about problems?

Saunders: Obviously, tons of people come to Petfinder, find the pet of their dreams, leave happy, send a happy tale, and it's all good. But we also occasionally hear from people who say, “I wanted to adopt, I tried to reach out, nobody would get back to me, so I went to a pet store.” Or “I tried to reach out, I got someone, they weren't helpful, they didn't seem to care that I was trying to do the right thing, so I went to a breeder.” And those are heartbreaking for us, because if our shelters and rescues knew that was the outcome they'd be horrified, but they don't necessarily put those things together. So



The Pet Rescue Foundation

Petfinder.com
FOUNDATION

we've been trying to come up with ways to try to gently get that message across and hit it home, particularly with the Ad Council campaign that [The Humane Society of the United States] and Maddie's Fund are working on, we thought, *Here is this amazing opportunity for adoptable pets ... reaching all these members of the public who maybe never considered adoption before. And hopefully it's going to increase in droves the people who are going to be going to shelters and rescues, showing up in the lobby, calling, and then I thought, Oh, no. They are so not ready for this.* So that's how this came up. We've been talking with Maddie's over time about what we could do, and the Ad Council campaign was really the impetus that told us we really need to do something right away. So this whole idea about a secret adopter seemed fair and genuine: It's an actual experience that anyone walking in off the street could have, and it allows us to give feedback to say, “Here was someone who for all intents and purposes was ready to bring a pet into their home, and based on the experience they had—if they went to one of the folks who were our winners—they would have left with a pet. But if not, who knows what would have happened then?”

So the calls were entirely focused on the adoption function of shelters and rescues?

Saunders: We decided to focus on adoption so it would be easy to compare, and the calls were all basically the same: The secret shoppers would look online, see Fluffy, and call and say, “I'd like to get some information on Fluffy, and I think I might want to adopt,” so it was kind of even across the playing field.

[q&a]

Did you give your people a script?

Saunders: For the e-mails and phone calls, Lisa Robinson at our foundation did those herself, and she did have a script to work from. So it was sort of standardized. For the in-person visits, there was only one winner a week, and those folks had a little more leeway; it was a little more subjective, and what we told them was the same idea: “Look on



KATHY DOUCETTE/FLICKR CREATIVE COMMONS

the website, see a pet you might be interested in, go in and see what your experience is like. Walk into the shelter, when you reach someone, ask about that pet, and see. And we asked them to consider, after their experience there, would they recommend that shelter to a friend or family member who was looking to get a pet? That was the thing. We had a lot of great experiences, and our secret adopters absolutely *loved* doing it. There were a few nonwinners. I want to say that six of the secret shoppers [made the award] on the first try, and the remaining ones awarded to the second shelter they visited. The folks who didn't give the award on the first try, it was [because of issues like] they'd walk in and the people behind the desk were busy chatting with each other and basically didn't give them the time of day until they walked up deliberately and were like, “Ahem!” And even then the people would be like, “Yeah, you can go down the hall.”

So it was more lack of attention than actual hostility or deliberate rudeness?

Saunders: Yeah, it was, and to different degrees. Some were just sort of lackadaisical, but there were some where the secret adopter was pretty intent, kept trying to find more people and asking questions, and kept get-

ting blown off at every turn, to the extent that one even told them, “Why don't you maybe come back tomorrow?”

So overall, what was your impression?

Were you pleasantly surprised?

Saunders: Yeah, I think we were. Because, you know the old story that when someone's happy they tell one person and when they're

not, they tell way more? We were concerned that because we were hearing these experiences multiple times that there were many, many more out there, that it was rampant. And based on our experiences, I don't think it

was. It is an issue, and all of our shelters and rescues could stand to take a good look at themselves and do everything to improve, but I do think that part of what we're finding is that the unhappy folks are speaking up the loudest. Which doesn't make it less important—it may make it *more* important if they're out there telling their friends and families, “Don't go to a shelter; those people are terrible.” We don't want that. Also, based on some of the reports, we wondered whether it would turn out to be rescue groups, which are sort of unregulated, that would turn out to be the culprits on these issues. And we really didn't find that; it was pretty steady across the board.

ASM: What was your impression about the results of the program?

Liz Neuschatz: I thought it was fantastic. We thought there might be some negatives, but people were excited about it, and a local group I know of actually had a meeting to tell their staff that this was happening and that everyone should be aware. And they said that while they wanted the grant, they mainly just wanted good customer service. If we can have that sort of impact on groups and get them talking about it and open the dialogue and reward groups for good customer service, then this program was definitely worth it.

Have you had any experiences with customer service at shelters?

Neuschatz: A while ago when I was trying to adopt a kitten for my kids, at the time I worked for *Petfinder.com*. And I said, “I'm the best home this kitten's going to get,” and [the shelter staff] were insistent that it go with its siblings. And I was like, “Are you kidding me? I have two kids, I work from home, I work for Petfinder, I have every good reference, I have other animals, and you're not going to adopt a cat to me?” And those cats grew old in the foster home. It's sad, and it's common. But there are people out there who really care and do a great job, and were really glad to be rewarded, because who's rewarding them? And in fact, we had a lot of e-mails to me saying, “Is this real, is this for real, are you really giving me \$500 for being nice?”

It's so hard for shelters because you do have to make judgments, but you have to find the line between making a reasonable judgment and checking these internal biases you may not even be aware of.

Neuschatz: Yeah, and with rescue, it's sometimes, “I have six foster cats in my house, and in theory I want to adopt them out—but really, no one is better than me.” That mentality. But we really hope that we can continue with some of this momentum.

ASM: Tell me about the process you went through with each group.

Lisa Robinson: What I did personally was when I called, and people would say that the cat had already been adopted, I would say, “OK, this is what I'm looking for. What can you tell me about adoption and other things, not just for the specific pet?” Because I wanted to give them every opportunity to tell me more and keep me engaged. Like, “What can you tell me about what I might need to think about before adoption?” Over 10 weeks, I made about 45-50 phone calls and we had 30 winners by phone.

Were there any overall trends or characteristics for which groups did better—animal control shelters, private humane societies, rescues?

Robinson: There weren't really any trends. The people who were the winners were really

passionate about what they did. For example, I called about one dog, and the people said, “Well, he’s not here, but we have another dog the same size,” and they were really excited to keep me talking and keep me on the phone. It was the same with the e-mails. I got a few that said, “Well, that cat’s been adopted, but the best thing to do is to set up an appointment and get you in here, and here’s some literature [about adoption].” The winners really tried to connect with you and tried to make you think about adopting a pet as a commitment, not just like buying flowers or something.

It sounds like you had mostly positive experiences. Did you encounter anything negative?

Robinson: The positive experiences were great, but some of the minor problems with the groups that weren’t awarded prizes were just those that really didn’t seem to want to engage me in a conversation. I’d call and say, “I’m looking for info on Rudy the cat—can you get me some information?” and they’d just say, “He’s adopted.” And I’d go, “Oh, OK ...” and would try to keep them in the conversation, and they just wouldn’t want to go further, really didn’t promote anything else. Also with the phone, a lot of them just didn’t answer—and I had checked their hours and their time zones and everything. And in terms of e-mails, we gave them a 24-hour turnaround, and a lot of them just didn’t respond, or responded with “That cat’s been adopted.”

What were your best experiences?

Robinson: My live visit was with a cat shelter, and it was just amazing. I went in, and I just said I was interested in adopting a cat, and they had a volunteer lead me around and show me everything about their facility and explain why different cats were in different areas. And they had cats with disabilities in a certain area, and they kind of encouraged me and said, “If you think this is something you could commit to, it’s great because they can get out of the shelter and it will give another cat an opportunity to get adopted, and these are cats that rarely get adopted.” I really liked how they encouraged me, but didn’t pressure me. And then the cat care manager came out and personally talked to me, and got down on the floor and encouraged me to hold all the cats. And they were so thrilled

to be awarded. That was the Hermitage Cat Shelter. There was also a phone experience [with the Summit County Animal Shelter] that was really great. I had called and said I was interested in a dog I’d seen on Petfinder, and he said “Absolutely,” and said he always liked to go sit with the dog when he talked to someone about them, so he went and sat with the dog and described him and his personality and his temperament, and said “He’s really special because of this,” and “These are things you need to think about when adopting him.” So he really gave personal attention to me and the dog. And then he said, “You might come in, and he might not mesh with your personality, but these are some other animals I can recommend for you.” And he said he was so glad I’d called about adoption ... he talked not only about the animal, but about the whole experience of adoption.

ASM: What made you decide to invest Maddie’s Fund money in this program?

Richard Avanzino: Well, we have a very generous benefactor, as you know: Dave Duffield, who’s created a couple of different companies, and he’s always identified himself as the founder, CEO, president, and “chief customer advocate.” He builds his successes on wonderful customer service. So it’s part of our genetic makeup. We believe to fulfill our mission as a cause, we have to have excellent customer service, because while we draw attention to the animals who need homes, unless the people are helped in making the match, we’re going to lose an opportunity, and sometimes that means a life taken. And that’s unacceptable. So we wanted to promote the best practices. Petfinder wanted to encourage better use of the technology tools they’ve been providing for these years—it’s a very successful search engine, but it can only be ultimately beneficial if people, once they’re drawn to the site and follow up, have the customer service that’s going to seal the deal.

What did you think about the results?

Avanzino: Well, I think it was encouraging, because we had been given some information that suggested something like 30 percent of the contacts initiated by the Petfinder user were not followed up with. Certainly our awards program had far better success than that, and to me, what’s exciting is that we can

chronicle those best practices, we can share that with all the folks in our cause, and allow them to use this information to assess where they stand with customer relations—are they at the top of the heap, in the middle, or somewhere behind? And here are some constructive ideas on how to get to the beginning of the line. We intend to do this on an ongoing basis—keeping customer service at the top of the priority list is terribly important. This is not just a one-off deal. To achieve our desired result, which is to build a No Kill Nation—which we think can be done certainly by 2015, if not within the three-year timeframe of the Shelter Pet Project—we need to have a fulfillment program, and that means great customer service.

Do you have an idea of how you’ll be continuing the program?

Avanzino: We haven’t had that discussion with Petfinder yet. Obviously they’re a partner in this, and a lot of the success is attributable to their follow-through and their administration of the grant, so we’ll obviously want to review with them. My guess would be that in the immediate future, we’ll be doing more of the same, but I think we’ll be benefiting from the experiences and the feedback we’re getting and adjust accordingly. But right now, this is a winner—it got a good amount of attention about the importance of this issue, and we’re going to be giving away a lot more money to a lot more agencies to put the carrot out there, but more importantly, to chronicle the good things that are being done so that others can benefit from it. I think the shelters—surprise!—find it nice to get some more money. But it’s not only the money that works—Petfinder is giving them some good public relations, because they’re getting a national award to hold themselves up as a model, which will hopefully encourage more contributions within their own community, improve their image, draw the traffic to their shelter, and make more delightful adoptions, which saves lives and starts new families, and loving relationships will abound. 

The complete list of winners is available at maddiesfund.org/Funded_Projects/Special_Projects/Customer_Service_Promotion.html.



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2. Key facts about canine influenza. CDC Website. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/canine>. Accessed May 1, 2009.
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Discrimination at the Adoption Counter

Does turning down a potential adoption put your organization at risk of a lawsuit?

BY CHERIE TRAVIS



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Recently, representatives from two area shelters contacted me with questions about adoptions they had rejected. One shelter had turned down an 85-year-old prospective adopter who wanted a kitten. Another organization turned down a family with a child with a mental disability who wanted a small puppy. Both prospective adopters had angrily declared that they would sue the shelter for discrimination.

So the question is, can adopters sue for discrimination—and beyond that, could they sue in these particular cases?

Practically speaking, it costs money to hire a lawyer and bring a lawsuit, so it is unlikely that the aggrieved prospective adopters will follow through. That's not to say that they won't tell their friends, neighbors, and co-workers about how horrible their experience was and how discriminatory they perceived it to be.

That kind of word-of-mouth could be damaging as well—to your shelter's reputation, and consequently to the animals you care for. How can you make sure your adoption decisions don't make your organization vulnerable to legal or publicity threats?

Denying Without Discriminating

Everyone has heard of a case in which someone who feels discriminated against files a lawsuit. But is every denial of services considered to be discrimination? Obviously not. Credit card companies regularly turn down credit card applicants, and colleges routinely deny some applicants admission.

To figure out whether there's a legal discrimination issue, you need to look at who is doing the refusing, who and what is being refused, and why.

Some states, such as California, have broad anti-discrimination laws. California's Unruh Act states that, "All persons within the jurisdiction of this state are free and equal, and no matter what their sex, race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, language spoken, disability, medical condition, marital status, or sexual orientation are entitled to the full and equal accommodations, advantages, facilities, privileges, or services in *all business establishments* of every kind whatsoever." (Emphasis added.)

Given that the law only mentions "business establishments," can you assume that it doesn't apply to a nonprofit or municipal agency? Not necessarily. The courts have not issued a blanket exception for nonprofit organizations. In *Doe v. California Lutheran High School Association*, the California Court of Appeals stated that a group "should not be deemed a business unless it has some significant resemblance to an ordinary for-profit business." While the court in that case determined that the admission decisions of a private religious school were not subject to the Unruh Act, the ruling was narrow. And there

Starting with this issue of *Animal Sheltering*, we will be alternating our Shelter Medicine column with this new department, appearing in every other issue.

Humane Law Forum will offer expert perspective on some of the day-to-day legal issues shelters face, examining the relevant case law and providing guidance and suggestions on how certain issues can be best managed to improve operations, keep shelter clients satisfied—and avoid lawsuits.

Our columnist is Cherie Travis, adjunct professor of animal law at DePaul University College of Law and Northwestern University School of Law, and the associate director of the Center for Animal Law at DePaul. She is the past chair and current legislative liaison for the Chicago Bar Association's Animal Law Committee, which has more than 75 lawyer-members. She is the president and co-founder of PACT Humane Society in Illinois, a founding member of the Chicago Animal Shelter Alliance, and was recently appointed commissioner of Chicago Animal Care and Control.

In her first column, Travis examines the issue of discrimination, asking when an adopting agency might be held liable for a decision not to adopt. Her advice: Be clear, consistent, and compassionate when enforcing shelter adoption policies.

[humane law forum]

are elements of standard shelter operations—business hours, adoption fees, etc.—that do resemble “an ordinary for-profit business.” There’s no guarantee about what direction courts will take in the future.

In addition, if your animal shelter receives public funding, either through operations as an animal control facility or by taking in strays through a contract with a county or municipality, you may be subject to an anti-discrimination ordinance or law.

This does not mean that your organization cannot evaluate prospective adopters—it merely means that you could be subject to statutes if you deny an adopter simply because of a factor such as sex, race, religion, etc. If you turned down the prospective adopter because they intended to give the puppy as a birthday present and your shelter has a specific policy against giving pets away as gifts, that’s different.

areas of “employment, transportation, public accommodations, public services, and telecommunications.” Public accommodations include such things as hotels, restaurants, bars, movie theaters, day care centers, senior citizen centers, homeless shelters, food banks, adoption agencies, and other social service center establishments.

While animal shelters are not included on the list, it’s helpful to look at how the courts have interpreted the Act as applied to “adoption agencies” to see how the courts might look at a future case alleging discrimination by an animal shelter.

In the New York case of *Adams v. Monroe County Department of Social Services*, the district court examined whether an adoption agency had violated the ADA when it did not place a foster child with a blind woman and her husband. The court determined that the county’s decision that the best interests of

children was “of paramount concern,” and agencies should be given some deference in such an important task.

Just as adoption and foster agencies are charged with the responsibility of the health and safety of children they place in homes, animal shelters are responsible for placing the animals in their care. Referring back to the example of the family with the mentally challenged child, if the shelter’s concern was with the health and safety of a small puppy that the family wanted to adopt, it seems that the court might view the shelter’s decision as reasonable if the facts indicated that the child did not possess the gentle handling skills required to care for a pet, or was prone to violent outbursts.

In the case of the blind plaintiff who wanted to adopt a child, the court also took notice of the fact that the plaintiffs were not willing to accept just any child—they specifically wanted a younger, white child and were not interested in an older or nonwhite child. This resonates with me as a shelter president who sees lots of adopters who are only willing to consider the littlest of puppies and kittens, when an adult animal may well be suited for that household.

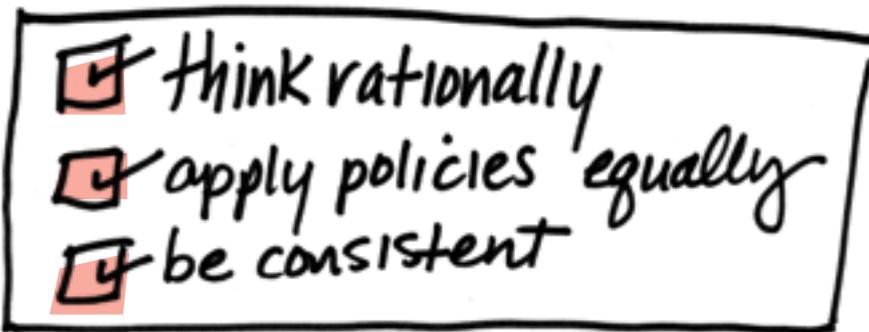
The court accepted that the adoption agency had taken the plaintiff’s blindness into consideration in determining whether she would be a fit adoptive or foster parent, but stated that it was a legitimate consideration “and that such a consideration did not amount to unlawful discrimination in violation of the ADA.”

This case highlights the importance of an evaluative process that emphasizes the health and safety of the animal and the person, and also suggests that options should be offered when possible.

Check Your Biases

Again, we will use the analogy of the adoption of children, which by all accounts would be given greater deference than the adoption of animals.

Many states have anti-discrimination laws that include sexual orientation, which has affected child adoption agencies. In 2007, a gay couple in San Jose, Calif., won a lawsuit against the adoption networking site *adoption.com* for violating the state’s anti-discrimination law mentioned above. And in 2006, the Boston



Who Was Denied—and Why?

For the sake of argument, let’s assume that the shelter that denied adoption to the elderly man was in California. Could it have violated the Unruh Act?

No, because age is not a provision in that law (not surprising because, had age been listed, minors would have been able to challenge age restrictions regarding renting cars and purchasing cigarettes and alcohol). In fact, age is seldom included in anti-discrimination laws, with the notable exception of the federal Age Discrimination Employment Act of 1967.

What about the family of the child with a disability? Could they sue under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a federal anti-discrimination statute? According to the government website *ada.gov*, the Act is intended to prohibit discrimination in the

the children would not be served by placement in the plaintiffs’ home (because of the risk of physical harm) did not constitute unlawful discrimination.

There is language in the case that is useful to our analysis of how a court might approach a discrimination claim against an animal shelter. The applicable state law, the court wrote in its ruling, “simply provides that ‘physical handicaps or illness of foster parents ... shall be a consideration only as they affect the ability to provide adequate care to foster children or may affect an individual child’s adjustment to the foster family.’ That is not a state-provided license to discriminate against persons with physical handicaps, but a reasonable regulation intended to ensure the health and safety of foster children, and it is not inconsistent with the ADA.” The court said that the safety of

Good customer service and a willingness to work with the public is a far better strategy than having a good defense attorney—and it's the best way to find homes for homeless animals!

archbishop shut down the adoption agency affiliated with Catholic Charities instead of submitting to Massachusetts' anti-discrimination policies, which would have required the agency to adopt to gays and lesbians.

Does this suggest that your shelter can't turn down a gay couple? No. You can turn down any couple, assuming that your reason is not related to their sexual orientation or marital status. If neither partner has a job or source of income and your shelter policies require that adopters be able to financially provide for their animals, your decision to turn them down would not be discriminatory. Likewise, if their apartment complex prohibits pets, your refusal to adopt would have a rational basis.

Let's look at another shelter dilemma: Say your shelter has a policy against declawing adopted cats and kittens. But a potential adopter is a hemophiliac, and says that he has been told by his doctor that he must have a declawed cat for medical reasons. Your shelter staff has shown him the already-declawed cats that you have, but he has not yet found one that he likes.

Does your shelter have to adopt to him, knowing that he will declaw the cat in violation of the shelter policy? No. Is the adopter being denied adoption based on his disability? Absolutely not. Your shelter is applying the same policy equally to all prospective adopters: You make declawed cats available to all adopters, including this one; you deny adoption to all adopters who will declaw, including this adopter.



Cherie Travis

Tips for Staying Out of Legal Hot Water and Keeping Clients Happy

- Have a disclaimer stating your right to deny adoptions. Include this on your adoption application.
- Set adoption policies based on rational criteria. Considerations of the health, safety, and well-being of the animal—as well as the health and safety of the adopter—are all reasonable, appropriate, and defensible.
- Be consistent. Train all your adoption counselors to handle adoptions the same way. If each adoption counselor is allowed to use whatever criteria they choose, you will be more vulnerable to charges of discrimination.

If a situation does come up, document everything. Why was the adopter turned down? Your adoption counselor should be able to articulate the reason for refusal. A shelter has a real health/safety concern about an elderly person adopting a young animal; the puppy or kitten may run near the person's feet, causing him to trip and fall and could injure the pet at the same time.

Were any alternatives offered? A court will likely find that the *individual* has not been discriminated against if she is given some options.

At my own animal shelter, I was once confronted by a prospective adopter who was African-American. She alleged racial discrimination when I refused her adoption. She had told me that her source of income was public assistance and financial support from her son, both precarious—so I thought she wasn't an appropriate adopter. However, I suggested some alternatives—she could foster cats for us, which would minimize her financial obligation, or she could volunteer with us, which would enable her to care for many cats without any burden at all. She was interested in neither. I wrote all of this—my concerns and the options I'd offered her—on the application before giving her a copy. We never heard anything further.

- Most important of all, try to work with the public! Remember, these people have come to try to adopt a homeless animal. The best way to avoid even the *threat* of a lawsuit is to provide good customer service.

Imagine if, in the case of the elderly adopter, the shelter representative had offered appropriate suggestions, such as showing him an older, docile cat that would match his own energy level. The shelter's concern that the adopter might die before the cat or become unable to care for her could be handled by talking to the adopter's family members; a relative could co-sign the adoption agreement and agree to be responsible for the cat. This is not foolproof and the cat could still be returned later on, but it would be worth discussing.

Likewise, the shelter that was confronted by the mother of a child with a disability would have been better off letting the parent know that, while a puppy wouldn't necessarily be the right fit for the family, the shelter would be happy to find the right animal. This willingness to help immediately sets a different tone. The shelter's representative could have checked to see if there were any available adult cats or dogs who were good with children.

The best way avoid litigation is to have and apply good shelter policies. Good customer service and a willingness to work with the public is a far better strategy than having a good defense attorney—and it's the best way to find homes for homeless animals! **AS**

Have a question about how the law might apply to your agency's policies and practices? Send it to us at asm@humanesociety.org.

The information contained in this article does not constitute legal advice and should not be used as a substitute for the advice of competent legal counsel. If your organization is facing a legal issue, contact an attorney.



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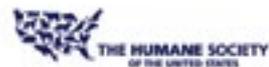
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A Framework Allowing for Change

Volunteer programs continue to thrive with the right people and systems in place

BY HILARY ANNE HAGER AND MEGAN WEBB



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Both Megan Webb and Hilary Anne Hager recently experienced major changes in their volunteer programs. Megan became the director of Oakland Animal Services in California, and Hilary moved the operations of Everett Animal Services in Washington state into a brand-new animal shelter facility.

Such huge changes might easily have crippled their volunteer programs; however, they've found that the foundations that they created ahead of time kept their programs running. In this article, they discuss the components of their volunteer programs that they believe were the most instrumental in their time of change.

Megan Webb: Prepping for a New Role

When I took on the position of volunteer manager at Oakland Animal Services nearly seven years ago, I knew I needed to create a program that could run without me. This became a guiding principle in how I developed the program—I knew that there would be a day when I would no longer be volunteer manager, and I wanted to make sure that the program would continue.

That day arrived when I became the director of Oakland Animal Services in April, leaving the volunteer manager position vacant. Things could have fallen apart, but instead the volunteer program is still highly functional when we need it most—in a time of change—because of several pieces that I had put into place earlier.

1. Mentors

I can't say enough about developing a strong mentor program—no volunteer program should be without this critical core component. One volunteer manager can't do all the training, hand-holding, and planning for a volunteer program, but if the volunteer manager is gone, well-trained and integrated mentors can step in to take over. I had created a team of 20 mentors who kept right on going when I became the director. Each of them have stepped up to take on new responsibilities, including:

- Running orientations
- Training new mentors
- Making volunteers official and welcoming them
- Checking in and following up with volunteers

[volunteer management]

- Answering potential and current volunteer questions through our online system
- Supervising volunteers when I'm not around
- Answering technology questions
- Monitoring our community message board and bringing big issues to me to address
- Revising training
- Planning new parts of the program

2. Staff Support

I'd worked hard on creating staff support for the volunteer program. Any time there is change in an organization, especially budget cutbacks, staff can begin to feel uneasy about their positions and can see volunteers as a threat. It is very important to find ways to develop staff support for volunteers when times are good so that this foundation is there when it is needed. As a volunteer manager, I made sure to bring up volunteers at every staff meeting and obtain input and suggestions from staff on how to develop the program. I made sure to show that I had listened to their suggestions and implemented the changes they'd wanted to see. This helped them feel ownership in the volunteer program.

Now, as the director, I evaluate my staff based on their interactions with volunteers, and I make sure to praise staff publicly when they thank and help volunteers. I can see from a new perspective how much power the leadership has over how staff responds to volunteers, something we've been talking about for years.

3. Automated Systems

This is critical! We have automated systems in place—to schedule volunteer orientations and trainings, track volunteer hours, provide online training, and maintain a message board—that continue to run without me. If I didn't have this in place, there would have been no way the volunteer program could have kept running. Without them, I couldn't have kept up with the administrative tasks of the volunteer program, and mentors would not have had systems to coordinate their efforts. In tough economic and budgetary climates, it can seem like these systems might be a tough sell, but the return on investment has been absolutely worth it.

4. Communication Systems

It is important to have mechanisms for your volunteers to communicate with each other and the organization. If you don't create these systems, your volunteers will, and you might be locked out of these discussions. We developed a volunteer message board while I was volunteer manager. This board has discussion areas devoted to dogs, cats, rabbits, and mentors. The message board has become even more important now that I'm director. With less time to spend one-on-one with volunteers, I'm able to look at the message board and quickly see the "hot" issues that the volunteers are discussing, and I can address misinformation before rumors spread and volunteers become angry about decisions before they have all the facts. It has also become a great way for me to handle potential and new volunteer questions. These questions are now sent to the message board rather than to my e-mail box. Official volunteers then answer these questions. This saves me a huge amount of time and gets these questions answered quickly.

5. An Open-Door Policy

My transition from volunteer manager to director has definitely not been problem-free. My biggest challenge is that I'm now the person making all of the euthanasia decisions—some of which are unpopular with volunteers. I used to be the person the volunteers went to when they were upset about the director's policies. Now, I'm the director. The mentors are helping by being available to talk with volunteers who have concerns. I

also try to make a conscious effort to have an open-door policy. However, it's not enough to simply leave my door open. I work on trying to slow down and not appear as swamped and busy as I feel. If I look too busy, people worry about "bothering" me, and when that happens, they hold on to issues until they become huge and blow up.

6. A Habit of Appreciation/ Acknowledgement

When I was volunteer manager, I wrote handwritten thank-you cards to volunteers who helped out in a special way or had reached a specific number of hours. I continue to do this as director, and I think it almost has *more* meaning, because people see that I've taken time out of my very busy schedule to appreciate their work.

Hilary Anne Hager: Making a Big Move

When I started at Everett Animal Services in 2007, the volunteer program had been run for nearly six years by a group of incredibly dedicated volunteers. They all had other commitments, including full-time jobs and families, but were committed enough to spend the rest of their free time running the program at our large, open-admission shelter with an annual intake of 9,000. They were responsible for all the orientations and training and ran a program with about 90 volunteers in a union shop, which was a great accomplishment.

I was the first staff person assigned to manage the volunteer program. I had about eight years of volunteer management under my belt at that point, and was excited to get in and make changes and improve the program.

What I discovered quickly was that the volunteers who had ownership of the program weren't nearly as excited as I was about all my plans for change. In fact, I think it's safe to say they were lukewarm about my suggested "improvements" and skeptical about the benefits of what I was advocating. I realized I would need to tread carefully in order to prevent my recommendations from being perceived as criticism of how the program had been functioning.

I am an advocate for structure, and for creating a program that is designed to meet the needs of the animal, the staff, and the organization best; some programs are designed



to suit the needs of the volunteers. Our old program wasn't *all* about the volunteers, but the staff had very little input into how the program was designed, and there were no mechanisms in place to get feedback from staff about how it was actually working from their perspective. And the program had grown dramatically over time—from five volunteers at the program's inception in 2002 to more than 90 in 2007. When you have five people, it's easy to all sit down in the same room, divvy up tasks, and tackle the assigned duties. When you have 90 people coming to your organization who want to serve and spend their time well, it's imperative to have structure in place to ensure everything runs smoothly.

My first step was to listen to find out what the volunteer leaders liked and didn't like about the program. My next step was to work on ways to recommend changes that allowed the volunteers to understand that I wasn't speaking out of my own preferences or a desire to turn the volunteer program into a replica of the one I'd run at my previous shelter. I needed to do some gentle education on best practices in volunteer management, so I started gathering resources.

I accessed animalsheltering.org, energizeinc.org, and other volunteer management sites to outline hallmarks of well-run programs. I had our whole volunteer leadership team take Susan J. Ellis' *Volunteer Program Audit* to grade the existing program against a measuring stick of someone else's judgment. Following that, I wrote a report as though I were an external consultant to the program, identifying key areas where changes and improvements could be useful: recruitment, screening, training, tracking, recognition, and staff/volunteer relationships.

Developing a Backup Team

While all of this was going on, we were developing a timeline for moving to our new shelter facility in April 2009. We had less than two years to develop a program that would best serve our needs in the new shelter. The shelter we had at that time had been built before the volunteer program existed; a new facility that was both people- and animal-friendly would open up all kinds of opportunity for volunteer involvement. We needed to create a program that would maximize our new building, and that meant taking a whole new approach to

the program, one that included structure and a well-trained group of volunteers who could work with little to no direct supervision by staff.

Once the volunteer group was on board with the direction we were headed and the need for more structure, I realized we couldn't do it all and needed more help. I utilized my monthly e-newsletters to put out the call to the general body of volunteers to ask for assistance in developing the program's next stage. I drafted a job description of what I thought the duties would look like, and set up an informational meeting to invite people into the project. I knew we'd need to have bi-weekly meetings (one evening and weekend day per month) and that volunteers who were interested in joining needed to be willing to

We grouped similar tasks together, then thought about where in the building those tasks could be completed, what times of the day would be best for them, and how many volunteers we'd need for each.

do the work. There was no sense in signing up if the amount of time they could dedicate to the project was limited.

We had 10 people step up to the plate; all of them were folks who had weekly volunteer commitments and were excited about driving the program in a new direction. I wound up with a glorious group of people, including a former teacher and union representative, a retired human services director, an engineer, a professional (human) trainer, a mom and her daughter who worked with the cats, plus our core group of five volunteer team leaders. It was incredible. I will say again and again that creating this "Transition Team" was the best and smartest thing I've ever done.

At our first meeting, I presented the transition team with my own vision for the program as a starting point, provided materials on best practices in volunteer management, and outlined my recommendations for program improvements. I spent a ton of time talking to them about my values around volunteerism and volunteer management, about creating a program with highly functioning, well-trained people who helped to reinforce to staff the

notion that the volunteer program is the best thing that ever happened to the shelter. I also *listened*—to what they saw for the shelter, what motivated them to participate as volunteers, what kinds of changes would help them feel more successful as volunteers. We resolved to incorporate their vision for next steps so we could co-create what we wanted to see happen.

Still, the volume of work was overwhelming, so our strategy was to divide and conquer. We split up the groups into task teams focusing on particular elements: developing the new training program, creating a new volunteer manual, revising recruitment materials/Web content, and reorienting all existing volunteers. These teams had set agendas and tasks to accomplish, with assignments due at each meeting. As the lead for all projects, I

was involved with each sub-group, but not responsible for developing all the content.

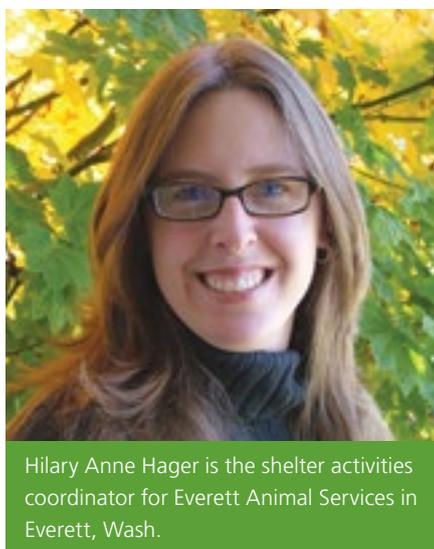
Our first step was to sit down and write the list of activities volunteers had been engaged in at our previous shelter. Then we sat down and made a list of all the things we'd always wanted volunteers to be able to do, but didn't have the space (or the training and systems in place) to make happen. Once that was in place, we sat down with the plans for the new building and tried to identify all of the other things that the new space would allow us to have volunteers do. We grouped similar tasks together, then thought about where in the building those tasks could be completed, what times of the day would be best for them, and how many volunteers we'd need for each. That gave us the information we needed to draft new position descriptions, which we ran past our staff before sending them to our human resources department and the union for approval. In fact, we ran all of our output past a committee of staff who could provide input in every step.

Once we knew what the program would look like, we started introducing all our vol-

[volunteer management]



Megan Webb is the director of Oakland Animal Services in California.



Hilary Anne Hager is the shelter activities coordinator for Everett Animal Services in Everett, Wash.

unteers to the program as it would exist in the new shelter. We required our volunteers to attend workshops about the changes to the program, which included length of shifts, a more structured schedule with definitive start and end times, processes for shift substitutions, a renewed minimum three-month commitment for all volunteers, and required further training before starting in the new building.

Expect the Unexpected

As all this work was occurring, the shelter took in nearly 150 dogs from a puppy mill bust, pushing our dog population from our usual 45 to more than 170. The transition team volunteers proved invaluable, stepping up into a leadership role as the shelter dealt with the overwhelming reality of caring for so many dogs in such poor condition. We'd spent much time with these volunteers and given them insight into the interior life of the shelter and staff perspective, which gave us a huge advantage. We simply could not have made it through without the extra help—and they mostly focused on directing other volunteers rather than providing animal care. They came in handy again when we experienced an influx of about 45 cats this summer from a hoarding case—the volunteer leadership team stepped up to help with cleaning and animal care as needed. The trust from staff was already established, so it was an obvious solution to the problem.

When the time for the move arrived, the transition team really came into its own. The volunteers oriented and trained the existing volunteers to the new facility, showing them the new building's layout, locations, practices, and protocols. They helped us move in and put away our supplies, organize our laundry and animal care supplies, and show our volunteers around. Once we were settled in, we started doing orientations and trainings for new volunteers, after having put recruitment on hold for five months in anticipation of the move. The transition team is responsible for providing training to each new class of volunteers coming through the system.

Even after being in the building for six months, we are still making tweaks and adjustments—to the volunteer trainings, to our practices, and even to some of our protocols. The volunteer leaders give input at each step and help make it happen. They train and

mentor new volunteers, give feedback to me about whether new recruits are a good fit for the program, and assist me with a variety of administrative tasks. We meet once a month after work at the shelter, bringing food and friendship and commitment to the table so we can cover the work that needs to be accomplished. I value these people more than I can ever really explain.

Bringing these volunteer leaders in to help guide the volunteer program also gave them an increased sense of ownership, engagement, and investment in the shelter operations in general. There is no question in my mind that we would not have been nearly as successful without their commitment to the work—I simply could not have done the amount of work that was required to make the changes to the program and to get everything put into place.

While I believe my volunteers are exceptional, I do not believe volunteers of this quality are unique to Everett, Wash. I believe that shelters and animal welfare groups all around the country can access people with time and talents they're willing to give to the animals via volunteer management rather than (or in addition to) direct animal care. It all depends on what you're inviting them to participate in, and how you structure their involvement. You have to be willing to spend the time uploading a lot of information so they can be totally on the same page as you move forward, which means less detailed oversight on your part.

Calling for Backup

All of our volunteer programs will ultimately undergo some major type of change—expected or unexpected. The key is planning. How well would your shelter's volunteer program function if you or your volunteer manager were no longer available? No program should survive solely on one person. We need to recruit other people to participate in taking on parts of the program and preparing for the future. We both agree that the most important tool any volunteer manager has is a team of volunteers who are willing and able to take on volunteer manager functions—call them mentors, a transition team, or some other word, but you need a group that backs you up so you're not doing this work alone. 

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THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

Days of Wine and Rabbits

Rescue group uses private-label vintage and the amorous image of rabbits to raise funds—and promote awareness of spay/neuter

BY JIM BAKER



MARCY SCHAAF/SAVEABUNNY

The best way to truly appreciate a fine wine is to savor its bouquet, as this lop-eared rabbit demonstrates. SaveABunny, a rescue group based in Mill Valley, Calif., dreamed up the idea of using a custom-labeled wine to spread the message that it is important to spay or neuter house bunnies—and to support the group's efforts at rehoming rabbits.

Lots of wines have funny animal names:

Arrogant Frog Ribet Red, Wild Horse Pinot Noir, the Little Penguin Shiraz.

Now you can add one to that list: Hampington Ridge Roll in the Hay Chardonnay.

The rabbit-themed vintage is the brainchild of Marcy Schaaf, founder and executive director of SaveABunny, a rescue group based in Mill Valley, Calif. And while the name's sure

to draw a chuckle, this humorous vintage is raising money for a very good cause.

The Humpington Ridge label is a clever way to spread the word about the importance of spaying and neutering rabbits. It also fits in with the rescue group's efforts to position house rabbits as great companions for adults, not just for children.

You could say that this unusual vintage was the result of Schaaf thinking outside the (wine) box.

"I was wondering, what could we do that's naughty, because I like to break the rules, and I wanted to tie it in with rabbits. 'Roll in the Hay Chardonnay' just came out," she says. As to the rest of the label, she says, "We were batting around names, and what do rabbits do? They hump."

In smaller print, the label reads, "Spay Or Neuter, Because Bunnies Don't Like Condoms." And below that is the rescue's website, and "SaveABunny. Save A Life."

In the center of the label is a stylized logo of two rabbits enjoying ... intimate time.

A volunteer who's a graphic designer put it all together, and then Schaaf went out and found a local vintner who was willing to work with her.

She tasted some of his wines, and eventually settled on a nice Chardonnay. The owner privately labeled seven and a half cases of it, and got it officially approved for sale.

SaveABunny is selling bottles of the wine—\$22 apiece, \$40 for two—at fundraising events, such as a garden party featuring catered vegan cuisine.

So is the bouquet of the rabbit-themed Chardonnay grassy, with a hint of carrot and alfalfa? Not at all, says Schaaf. "The thing is, it's a good wine, and that's an important thing for people to know—it actually tastes good," Schaaf says. [🐰](#)



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FRP Sani-Cage



Glass Gated Kennels



Double Deck Kennels



Above-floor Kennels

Mason Company understands that every customer has a unique space. Our expert complimentary design service takes the guesswork out of creating the perfect system, crafted just for you. Plus, you'll love the price because at Mason, custom never costs extra.



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Every animal that leaves your shelter should be wearing a visible ID Tag

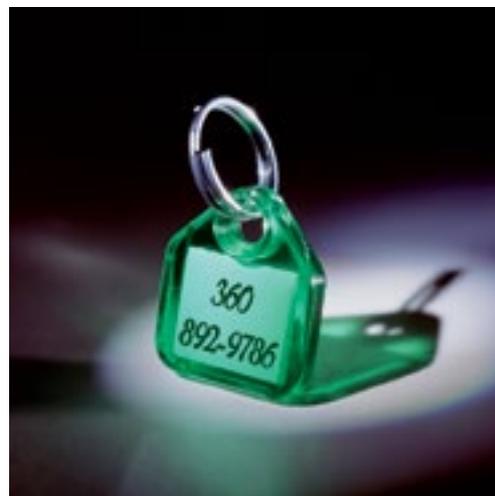
**A visible ID tag increases the chances
of a lost pet returning home by 95%.
Provide RescueTags® for your adoptees
to ensure they can get back to their
rightful owner.**

RescueTags®

Easy to customize and built to last, don't let the simple design fool you — RescueTags are tough. In fact, we literally road tested our RescueTags against their stainless steel, brass and aluminum counterparts. Dragged behind a car for over one-hundred miles, the specially formulated plastic RescueTag held up to bumps and scrapes where the metals could not.

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