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January/February 2011

Sheltering

The Magazine for Animal Care Professionals and Volunteers

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ANIMAL Sheltering

The Magazine for Animal Care Professionals and Volunteers



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A License to Succeed

In Calgary, mandatory licensing for both dogs and cats is producing nearly enough revenue to cover the cost of providing animal services in a city of 1.1 million people. Compliance is high, and the licensing program has helped boost return-to-owner rates and reduce euthanasia. Animal services director Bill Bruce says people are buying into licensing because they see the value the program is delivering—eliminating the need for heavy-handed enforcement.

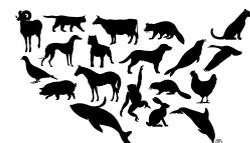


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Sweating the Small Stuff

Animal shelters vary widely in size, budget, staffing, leadership, and animal care practices. Most battle the unpleasant realities of too many animals, too few staff members, and too little money. So what are the key components of a progressive shelter that saves animals' lives? The Humane Society of the United States' Shelter Services program uses shelter veterans to evaluate shelter operations and help agencies drive change.

ALSO:
Noise control is a major issue for shelters. Barking creates a painfully loud environment for staff, and can cause potential adopters to flee. But some shelters have discovered innovative ways to achieve a little peace and quiet—from creative architectural design and retrofitting to adding soothing background music and helping dogs chill out.
—The "101" Department, p. 39





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A California community college finds a humane way to reduce its rabbit population; a veterinarian from Romania marks a spay/neuter milestone; guinea pig rescue groups around the country raise money through “pignics”; a cat who got “marinated” and locked in a car trunk finds a new home after being rescued in upstate New York; and much more.

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In your space, you told us about the most amazing transformations you’ve seen during your animal welfare work.

39 The “101” Department

Are howls and woofs the inevitable soundtrack at a shelter? Not necessarily. You can turn down the volume through a variety of methods, from innovative design or retrofitting to clicker training and enrichment programs.

44 Q & A

Nearly a decade in the making, the guidelines for the animal sheltering field developed by the Association of Shelter Veterinarians will be released this spring. Members of the task force that developed them discuss how the standards can be used to improve the health and welfare of shelter animals.

47 Shelter Medicine

Kittens and puppies are the animals most likely to get adopted from your shelter, and also the most likely to leave before they’re spayed or neutered. The result is often unwanted litters. Veterinary columnist Brenda Griffin addresses the value of pediatric sterilization—including operating on cats and dogs as young as 6 weeks.

53 Volunteer Management

Every shelter should strive to successfully incorporate its volunteers into the organization’s work, treating them as the vitally important partners that they are. Not all shelters are quite there yet—there’s sometimes a disconnect between the lofty ideal and the volunteers’ day-to-day experiences. But shelters can still recruit and train volunteers, giving them an honest idea of what to expect, and working to create a welcoming culture.

60 Off Leash

The computer—is there anything it can’t do? An innovative tool allows people with a Web connection to play with shelter cats, without going anywhere near the colony room.

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ANIMAL SHELTERING MAGAZINE STAFF

Editor

Carrie Allan

Associate Editor

James Hettinger

Staff Writer/Copy Editor

Jim Baker

Production/Marketing Manager

Shevaun Brannigan

Advertising Manager

ReNae Vorgert

Design

Bussolati Associates

Chairman, Board of Directors, Humane Society of the United States

Anita W. Coupe, Esq.

President and CEO, Humane Society of the United States

Wayne Pacelle

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Animal Sheltering

P.O. Box 351; Congers, NY 10920-0351
866-512-3111 (toll free) 845-267-3004 (local)
845-267-3478 (fax)
animalsheltering@cambeywest.com

Editorial Offices

Please send letters to the editor, Coffee Break submissions, and article ideas to: *Animal Sheltering* magazine/HSUS
2100 L St., NW
Washington, DC 20037
202-452-1100 (phone)
301-258-3081 (fax)
asm@humanesociety.org
animalsheltering.org

Advertising Information

Contact ReNae Vorgert, *Animal Sheltering*’s advertising manager, at 701-572-9100 or rvorgert@humanesociety.org.

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Every day is “spay day” for shelters and other animal welfare organizations working to reduce pet overpopulation. But at this time of year, you have a chance to participate in a special spay/neuter event—one that stretches around the world.

Spay Day 2011, sponsored by The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and its global affiliate, Humane Society International, with support from the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association, is set for Feb. 22. Now in its 17th year, Spay Day promotes awareness of the importance of spay/neuter through events held in the United States and around the world. Organizations participate throughout the month of February by holding spay/neuter clinics, organizing fundraisers, lobbying for political action, spreading the word through educational efforts, and more. Need an idea? Visit humanesociety.org/spaydayparticipate.

Groups holding Spay Day events can also benefit from the popular online pet photo contest, which runs from Jan. 19 through March 4. People post photos of their pets online and designate an eligible animal welfare agency to receive the money generated when viewers spend \$1 apiece to vote for their favorites. Last year, the contest attracted more than 32,000 photos, raising more than half a million dollars for nearly 300 animal welfare organizations in the U.S. and abroad.

To learn more, go to humanesociety.org/photocontest.

Spay Day serves to remind you that—as stressed-out and isolated as you may sometimes feel working in the animal welfare field—you’re truly not alone. You’ve got peers around the country and around the globe seeking to create a more humane world for animals, and developing creative solutions to many of the same problems you face.

Part of our job at *Animal Sheltering* is to highlight such efforts, and we do so again in this issue. In our “101” Department, for example, you’ll find innovative ways to deal with the near-universal problem of shelter noise. We also highlight the work of The HSUS’s Shelter Services team, which performs evaluations around the country to help shelters accentuate their strengths and eliminate their weaknesses.

As always, we’d love to hear about what’s working well in your community, or what problems you haven’t yet mastered. To pose a question, offer a suggestion, or comment about the magazine, drop us a line at asm@humanesociety.org.

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



Mouthpieces Fan

I love the Mouthpieces bits you have printed recently. I hope you will continue with them. I have all of them printed out and hanging around our shelter. They are great!

—Carrie Mooser
Animal Control Coordinator
New Albany/Floyd County Animal Shelter
New Albany, Ind.

Collared, Tagged, and ... Outdoors?

We’re pleased that you are helping organizations like ours by preparing pieces that can be used locally (“Love Your Cat? Then Tag Your Cat!”—Mouthpieces, July-August 2010, p. 15).

But why the outdoor, grassy setting? I’m guessing you mean to indicate that the kitten is lost. But to us, the implication is that it is OK to let your cat out if it has a tag, particularly since most people look at the picture and the big print only.

—Jan Shellhammer
Editor, Pet Tales
Dumb Friends League
Denver, Colo.

Editor’s note:

Thanks for the reminder about the ambiguity of images. We’ll continue to keep it in mind!

Readin', 'Ritin', and Rabbits

College combats bunny overpopulation with a TNR/adoption program

BY JAMES HETTINGER

Long Beach City College isn't the hoppin' place it used to be—and that's good news.

Once, the community college south of Los Angeles teemed with hundreds of abandoned pet rabbits and their offspring. Dropping them off on campus had become a misguided local tradition dating back 30 years or more, says Jacquie Olson, an administrative assistant for the dean of physical education and athletics. Local residents would typically drive into a parking lot near some bushes, open the car door, and dump out their unwanted rabbit—a practice that Olson points out is not only inhumane but against the law in California, punishable by a \$500 fine and up to six months in jail.

The college traditionally receives an influx each spring shortly after Easter, Olson says. Families get a cute, cuddly bunny for the holiday and suddenly realize that rabbits can require nearly as much work as a dog or cat. Children and parents quickly lose interest in

cleaning the rabbit cage every day, so they opt to drop the bunnies at the college.

"They think it's like a Disneyland for rabbits, because it's a green campus, and there's lots of open spaces, and they think rabbits want to run free," Olson says. "They don't look at it from the rabbits' point of view—that the rabbits struggle to find shelter, and they struggle to find food, and if it weren't for a few employees on campus putting out feeding and watering stations, those rabbits would starve to death."

Olson began rescuing and finding new homes for the rabbits on her own about 10 years ago, but the problem persisted, reaching an estimated 300 rabbits.

"They were everywhere," says Donna Prindle, a professor in the physical education department who started helping Olson about a year ago. An extensive renovation of the campus made the rabbits more visible to predators such as hawks and owls. It forced them out of their usual dwelling spots and into some inappropriate places, including the athletic fields. One bunny was found making her burrow behind the softball field's home plate.

In 2009, Olson and Prindle approached the administration about finding a humane solution, and the college formed a rabbit task force. Prindle contacted the Utah-based Best Friends Animal Society, which suggested an innovative approach: a trap-neuter-return (TNR) program, similar to the strategy frequently used for feral cats.

Best Friends helped connect the college with the veterinary school at nearby Western University of Health Sciences. The Western University mobile veterinary unit, staffed by four full-time vets and about 15 student volunteers, came to Long Beach in March 2010 for a two-day spay/neuter event that resulted in sterilization surgeries for 83 rabbits rounded up largely by Olson and Prindle. "It was an incredible event because these people were so organized, and so meticulous, and so



Rabbits—like the one shown here mingling with some art students—have long been a part of the picture at Long Beach City College in California.

dedicated to what they were doing," Olson says. "We just kind of stood in the background and watched it all happen."

Diane McClure, a veterinarian and associate professor at Western University, says she savors one compliment in particular from the Long Beach City College participants. "They said, 'We're amazed at your students, because it was a really long day,' and they said the last rabbit got the same care as the first rabbit."

The team returned in May and performed surgeries on another 75 rabbits. More recently, Olson and Prindle have been gathering groups of about 10 rabbits and taking them to the university every few weeks for spay/neuter surgeries.

Debby Widolf, rabbit department manager for Best Friends and a volunteer at the college's first spay/neuter event, says the level of organization was amazing—with



Jacquie Olson, an administrative assistant at Long Beach City College, works in a former carpentry department building that serves as a temporary holding area for spayed and neutered rabbits awaiting adoption. Olson has cared for and rescued rabbits on campus for years, and pushed for a humane solution to the overpopulation.

each rabbit given a physical before the surgery, and a post-surgery area where students held the bunnies on heating pads. "It was really sweet," she says. "There wasn't anything at all cavalier about bringing in these rabbits and caring for them and making sure that they had what they needed."

Rabbits don't always get that kind of respect, Widolf notes. Because they're so plentiful, they're often viewed as disposable, which leads to the kind of problem found at the college, and has caused them to become the third-most-euthanized animal in shelters. "Spaying and neutering is definitely one of the answers for them," she says. "I think that when shelters offer clinics to spay and neuter dogs and cats, they just really need to include rabbits, too."

Trap, Neuter ... Adopt

The ongoing construction at Long Beach City College—which is removing some of the buildings under which the rabbits lived, and paving new parking lots—makes it impossible to release all the rabbits back onto the campus, Olson explains. The college, which is replanting the landscaping the rabbits have eaten, and filling the holes they've dug, doesn't really want the rabbits on campus; the facilities department redirected a \$10,000 facilities improvement grant to cover spay/neuter expenses. "And we don't really want the rabbits on campus, either, because

it's not a safe place for them," she adds, citing the threat of predators.

So a former carpentry building on campus, stocked with cages donated by Best Friends, has been converted to a "rabbit recovery area" housing bunnies awaiting adoption. Olson says many of the rabbits—including those born on campus—never really become wild and remain highly adoptable. "They are sweet and gentle and affectionate. And because we've been handling them on a daily basis—we pick them up and take them out of the cage, clean their cage and put them back in, and hold them and love them—they love us. They love people." Unlike feral cats, she adds, the rabbits are friendly and easy to handle.

To promote adoptions, the project's organizers have placed a notice on the school's website, asked local churches to post a flier, and worked with the Bunny Bunch, a local rescue group. Olson admits the adoptions are going slower than she'd like, but says she still has avenues to explore. The goal was to adopt out all the available rabbits by the end of 2010.

Olson and Prindle say the impact is noticeable: As of mid-September, about 140 rabbits had been adopted out, 40 had been spayed or neutered and returned to the campus, and 80 remained in the recovery center. Olson estimates that the number of unsterilized rabbits at large on campus has dwindled to 20 or 25.

Animal Sheltering Online

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

- Go to animalsheltering.org/mouthpieces to download a poster encouraging pet owners to take their dogs off their chains, and bring them inside.
- For more information on creating a welcoming environment for volunteers, check out animalsheltering.org/volunteermanagement, where you'll find some of *Animal Sheltering's* previous Volunteer Management columns, including "Building a Successful Volunteer Program," "Take Time for Training," and "Leading Change at Your Shelter." To see the document that Everett Animal Services in Washington state uses to help prospective volunteers gauge their fit with the program, go to animalsheltering.org/aboutourvolunteers.

"I think we've changed the idea that this is a bunny sanctuary," Prindle says. She credits the media attention the first spay/neuter roundup received (which ranged from local TV to *The Wall Street Journal*), as well as the signs posted on campus to notify people of the potential \$500 fine. "We have very few drop-offs right now, which is a huge improvement."

Olson agrees. "When Donna and I walk around campus ... we don't see any more baby bunnies, which tells us that the spay and neuter [and] release is working." The rabbits she does spot often have an ear tattoo indicating they've been spayed or neutered, she adds. "And those rabbits are happier because they're not popping out babies every 28 days." **AS**



A mobile veterinary unit from nearby Western University of Health Sciences has visited Long Beach City College to help spay and neuter rabbits. Faculty members or graduate veterinarians perform the surgeries, assisted by students. Working the spay/neuter event last March, left to right, are veterinary technician Luann Manley and veterinarians David Forster and Marc Togneri.



Skilled with a Scalpel

A spay/neuter veterinarian takes his commitment to ending pet homelessness to new heights

When veterinarian Don Popa picks up his surgical instruments, watch out: Any intact pets in the immediate area can rule out the prospect of parenthood.

In his battle to eliminate unwanted litters and reduce pet overpopulation, Popa, who runs the spay/neuter clinic at the Ramona Humane Society in San Jacinto, Calif., has racked up some pretty staggering numbers. He's been known to do 60-70 spay/neuters a day, though these days he's averaging around 40. He hit his all-time high in winter 2008, when, working out of a mobile clinic, he did 106 spay/neuters—59 dogs, 46 cats, and one rabbit.

Popa, 55, keeps meticulous records of every spay/neuter surgery he does, writing them all down in notebooks he keeps at home. His monthly goal at the clinic is 700 procedures.

On Dec. 22, 2009, Popa reached a career milestone: his 100,000th spay/neuter surgery,



Veterinarian Don Popa has devoted his career to doing as many spay/neuter surgeries as he can. On Dec. 22, 2009, he performed his 100,000th procedure.

a feat that took him 12 years to achieve. The shelter staff had a little party for him, cake was served, and a reporter from the *Riverside Press-Enterprise* came and interviewed him. Even his mother, visiting from his native Romania, was there to share the moment.

"That day, when I accomplished my 100,000th surgery, I don't know how to say this—I was on a nine cloud, if you will," says Popa, in charmingly accented English. "I was floating, I was not walking, and glowing, I'm sure."

It was a long journey to reach that peak. Popa, who graduated from veterinary school in Romania, defected from the then-Communist country at age 30 in 1985, exasperated with trying to treat animals without the benefit of surgical instruments or medicine. While visiting his American-born aunt in Thousand Palms, Calif., he applied for political asylum,



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the first step of an exhausting process that would drag on for seven years. He worked with immigration lawyers to sort out his legal status in the United States, while taking whatever jobs he could find—such as gardening and cleaning houses.

Once he got his official work permit, Popa started out as a kennel attendant, cleaning cat cages at Animal Samaritans SPCA in Thousand Palms. There he got to know a group of veterinarians who leased the small shelter's spay/neuter clinic at night to run an emergency clinic. They invited him to work as a technician in their separate private practices, while he learned English and looked into restarting his own veterinary career in America.

He eventually found out about an educational commission for foreign veterinary school graduates that offered a program to enable them to become veterinarians in the United States. The commission recognized his Romanian school as an accredited institution, which meant he didn't have to start all over again. But Popa had to take three English comprehension exams, and was told he would either have to attend one year at a U.S. veterinary school, or else pass a brutal five-day exam covering all aspects of veterinary medicine. Lacking money for tuition, he chose the latter—though he was nervous about it, having been told that only about 6 percent of examinees pass. "I was thinking, 'Oh my good Lord,'" Popa recalls, laughing. "I was so happy that I passed this exam, because this was a really, really tough one."

He passed the test in 1992, which established him as a licensed veterinarian. In 1993, he passed the California State Veterinary Board Exam, so he could practice in that state.

Popa returned to work at the emergency clinic, and began doing relief work in its separate practices. During that time, as he was looking to adopt a kitten, Popa visited an animal shelter in Palm Springs. It was his first experience at a large-scale animal control facility, and it made a deep impression.

"We didn't have [animal shelters] in Romania—this was a new concept, for me,

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anyway. What I saw was pretty disheartening," Popa says. "I saw all these animals, and I thought, 'Wow, now they look like they need real help here,' so I started asking, how can you help animals in a shelter?"

Popa heard about several for-profit and nonprofit spay/neuter programs in the area, and in addition to his other veterinary jobs,

the public in the front of the clinic. He also teaches a rigorous eight-hour class to certify the shelter's technicians in euthanasia, and he performs routine surgery on shelter animals to repair lacerations and broken bones.

The shelter's thrilled to have such a prolific spay/neuter veterinarian on staff, accord-



Jeff Sheppard, left, president/CEO of the Ramona Humane Society in San Jacinto, Calif., and Don Popa reassure Sam, a shelter dog who will be neutered before going home with his new owner.

started doing relief work for them. "I was amazed at how fast I picked that up. In a couple of months, I was able to do over 30 [spay/neuters] a day," he says.

Then he was hired as a spay/neuter veterinarian at the Riverside County Department of Animal Services. Seeing all the sick and homeless animals, the pets who were euthanized due to a lack of adopters, weighed heavily on him. "And I thought, 'We need to do something about this, and what I can do is my best to participate in preventing this,'" he recalls.

Popa worked at Riverside County for about five years, then was hired to run the Ramona Humane Society's spay/neuter clinic, where he has a staff of five—two to help him in surgery, three to work with

ing to president/CEO Jeff Sheppard. "It's been the most fortunate thing in the Ramona Humane Society's history, to have the relationship with Dr. Popa. ... It makes a whole difference in our mission," he says.

To celebrate his 100,000th spay/neuter surgery, Popa adopted the very next pet he operated on—a tan-and-white female Chihuahua he named Dolly. "It was in the stars. She was meant to be mine," he says. "Every time I go home, she's all over me. This is what keeps me going. I'm driven—I really want to complete at least another 100,000 before I go." **AS**

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ROBERT DEFRESSE

Diane Damewood snuggles up with a friend at the Boston Pignic.

For guinea pig aficionados, the morning of a big “pignic” is much like opening day for baseball fans: Even the nonreligious pray for sunshine. But while good weather helps make a pignic a success, the crucial ingredients are high spirits—and guinea pigs.

Pignics are fundraising, educational, and social events for the guinea pig set. In the Washington, D.C., area, Metropolitan Guinea Pig Rescue (MGPR) has been hosting its PIGstravaganza for five years, but it’s only one of about a dozen pignics held around the country. I’ve been attending for three years, first as a member of MGPR and now as its fundraising coordinator. The event is typically held in a park or backyard, where guinea pig lovers bring their pets and adoptable animals, set them up in pens, and watch the grass go—yes, go, right down the gullets of their hungry darlings.

The day of the 2010 PIGstravaganza in Reisterstown, Md., started off ominous, cold, and with lurking clouds. Still, optimistic attendees packed up their piggies and pens,

and headed off to the park—and their high hopes paid off.

“The sun came out, and so did the people,” says Becky Wilson, a member of the MGPR board of directors. And of course, the people came bearing pigs, including many MGPR “alumni.” It made for a fond reunion, and a chance to watch the pigs play and to see how they had grown: According to Wilson, Hazel—a once famously antisocial MGPR guinea pig—was actually trying to hop from cage to cage to meet new friends.

Pignics bring in money by celebrating all things guinea. At PIGstravaganza there’s a raffle with pig-related prizes, bake sales with pig-themed goods, and cozy supplies they can buy to pamper their pets. Special prizes are awarded to the pigs in attendance; some awards are determined by a competition (“fastest eater”) while others are based on the opinion of the judges (“biggest diva”).

Many talented people in the rescue group donate their skills. Beth Henry of MGPR owns a card and stamp company, so guinea pig

cards make an appearance. Lisa Mock has a talent for sewing and donates her time and fabric to make guinea pig beds and tunnels. Some of these items are distributed through the raffle, which features botanical hays, custom Mock-made guinea pig beds, and hard-to-find specialty treats.

Wilson also mingles throughout the event with the nail trimmers, offering on-the-spot grooming services. The clipping is provided for free, but it often brings in donations. Another service provided by the rescue is properly sexing guinea pigs: Many a “Victoria” has left the pignic newly established as a “Victor.”

The event is a success partly because MGPR strikes an excellent balance of providing paid merchandise and free benefits; the mix brings in the funds while creating a fun, social atmosphere.

While most pignics don’t involve an entrance fee, holding an event that requires one isn’t out of the question. Guinea pig lovers don’t often meet many of their kind, and they’ll likely pay for the opportunity to do so. This year an attendee came all the way from New York to attend the event in Maryland.

Sally Hurley, a computer programmer by day who organized the Boston Pignic, has



ROBERT DEFRESSE

“Pignics,” about a dozen of which are held around the country, serve as fundraising and social events for guinea pig lovers, as well as a place for pets and adoptable animals to get together in pens.

more than 20 years of guinea pig experience. The Boston Pignic began in October 2003, replacing the now-defunct New England Pignic.

Tracy Patruno, who has attended the Boston and New England pignics, says the ideal event boils down to “kicking back while being surrounded by a whole bunch of cute.”

The Boston pignic certainly fits that description. About 50 guinea pigs attend. The set-up differs from PIGstravaganza: Rather than having many little pens, the guinea pigs—divided by gender—hang out together in two large pens. Sometimes that can mean that “whole bunch of cute” can turn into a rolling ball of teeth and fur. (For these feisty guineas, there is a time-out pen!)

The Boston pignic isn’t focused on fund-raising, but people do sell guinea pig goodies to benefit the rescue. Like all pignics, the benefit is mainly for the animals, says Hurley. “This [is] an opportunity to let your pigs get outside in a fairly protected area, interact with other guinea pigs, eat the grass, and



In the Washington, D.C., area, Metropolitan Guinea Pig Rescue has held a “pignic” for five years to celebrate all things pig. The activities include raffles with guinea pig-related prizes, pet supplies for sale, and on-the-spot nail trimming.

have some fresh air. I know my pigs really loved it.”

Interested in starting your own pignic? “The hardest part is getting someone

to actually take charge of it, and getting enough people that it feels worthwhile ... and then trying to find a place to hold it,” Hurley says. A pignic location must have untreated grass—so there will be no danger of pigs getting sick from nibbling—and no nearby dogs, as well as shady spots in case the day is hot.

At the end of a typical pignic day, the sun is setting, and the eyes of many tired guinea pigs are starting to close. Their bellies are full, their nails are trimmed, and fur is soft from so much petting. While a successful pignic can bring in several hundred dollars—this year’s Pigstravaganza, for example, brought in almost \$300—the best pignics are about more than money. “We looked out at the back field,” says Wilson, “and it was just filled with pens and guinea pigs.” **AS**

To locate or advertise a pignic in your area, visit cavymadness.com/pigniccentral.html.

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Late for Dinner ... Luckily

A bizarre cruelty case leads to a new home for New York's "marinated" cat

It's an adoption counselor's worst nightmare: The adopter who seemed perfectly nice and rational at your front desk, who took one of your animals home, turns out to be more than a little loopy. The pet you adopted is involved in a bizarre case of animal abuse, and the story is picked up by media outlets around the world.

Alice Malone, a staff member at the SPCA Serving Erie County in Tonawanda, N.Y., had to live through it.

The story started when officers Jerry Guilian and John Poisson of the Buffalo Police Department's Mobile Response Unit made a routine traffic stop at 7:45 p.m. on Aug. 8. They pulled over a car whose driver, Cheektowaga resident Gary L. Korkuc, had failed to use his turn signal. During the stop, the officers heard a cat meowing in the car's trunk, and they asked Korkuc to open it. Inside, they found a black-and-white cat who,

according to a police report, was in a cage apparently "marinating" in a mixture of crushed red peppers, chili pepper, salt, and oil.

Police charged Korkuc with one count of aggravated cruelty to animals. Officers called the SPCA in Tonawanda—the Buffalo Police Department has a good working relationship with the shelter, which is a 15- to 20-minute drive from the site of the traffic stop. A humane officer came to transport the cat to the facility.

Korkuc has denied that he planned to eat the cat. He has also claimed that the cat was pregnant and had miscarried and was not sitting in marinade, according to a story on a local TV station's website. (The 4-year-old cat is actually a neutered male.) Korkuc was scheduled to appear Aug. 17 in Buffalo City Court to answer the charge of animal cruelty, but failed to appear; a bench warrant was issued for his arrest.



LAURA GRANAMBY/SPCA SERVING ERIE COUNTY

SPCA Serving Erie County adoption counselor Alice Malone, left, visits Oliver in his new home, as owner Vickie Dankowski of Cheektowaga, N.Y., looks on.

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Two days after the traffic stop, the bizarre story broke in the *Buffalo News*, soon spreading to news outlets across the country and internationally. Malone read about it in her newspaper while she was at the doctor's office. She thought the perpetrator's name sounded disturbingly familiar. "So [when] I came into work, I looked in the computer, and I saw that I did the adoption, and I just started crying, because I felt so bad for the kitty." Malone says there was nothing about Korkuc during his visit to the shelter that would have tipped her off that he might pose a risk to the cat. "He was like a normal person. I was mortified when I had heard what he had done."

Gina Browning, the SPCA's director of public relations, remembers watching Malone as the impact of the incident hit home. When the story broke, Malone had been on vacation; she came back to work the same day the media arrived at the shelter to continue its coverage. "I happened to be standing in the adoption lobby when she first walked in ... and she looked at me, and her eyes filled up with tears. She was just so distraught over this, and she kept saying, 'It's my fault, it's my fault,'" Browning recalls.

Once the cat, known as Navarro, was back at the shelter, staff members gave him three baths with special shampoo to remove all the spices and oil. "By that second day after his bath, you would think nothing happened to this poor guy. He likes to climb high in the cat playgrounds, and we would dangle the feathers for him to go after," Browning says.

Meanwhile, Browning fielded at least a dozen calls from people wanting to learn more about the cat or wanting to adopt him—including one from a woman in Kansas who was ready to fly in and pick him up. She spoke to media people from as far away as Ireland, Australia, and Japan.

Vickie Dankowski, a Cheektowaga resident, read about Navarro's ordeal in the newspaper. The story shocked her; she wondered about what the cat might have gone through during his three months with Korkuc before ending up in a car trunk. She'd been thinking of getting another cat, as her 15-year-old domestic shorthair, Tigger Marie, had died of cancer several months before, and she wanted to adopt



LAURA GRAHAM/SPCA SERVING ERIE COUNTY

Rescued kitty Oliver, left, chills out with his new sister, Annabelle, at the home of his adopter.

a second cat as a companion for her other kitty, Annabelle.

Dankowski came to the SPCA later that same day. Another woman was already preparing to adopt the cat, but the two of them talked it over. "So she said to me, 'Did you give it a name yet?' I said, 'I have a name all picked out. His name is Oliver.' And she just hugged me, and she said, 'You know what? You should take the cat,'" she recalls.

Dankowski came back that evening, completed the adoption paperwork, and then took the newly named Oliver home.

The painful experience hasn't changed the way Malone feels about her job. "I just cringe at the thought of what would have happened to this poor little kitty. I was devastated for a while," she says. "Of course I'm going to be emotional and be upset, but then again, looking back at it, I didn't do anything different than I would do today."

And while the incident was extremely disturbing, it won't result in any changes to the SPCA's adoption policies, says executive

director Barbara Carr, noting that it would be a mistake for the shelter to overreact to an isolated instance, stiffen its adoption policies, and cost many pets a chance to find homes.

"What do you think we should do: Make sure everyone sees a psychiatrist before they come to us, and bring a note?" says Carr.

Browning says the shelter followed appropriate procedures in Korkuc's case. There was nothing about him that raised a red flag. "The media wanted to know how this particular incident was going to change our adoption procedures. And our answer was: It's not. We're very confident in our adoptions here," she says.

Malone's thrilled with the happy ending to the cat's saga. "Having Oliver go to a great home just warms my heart so much. ... Everything just worked out." **AS**

Turning Grief into Understanding

Association guides people after the death of a pet

Wallace Sife has built a figurative lifeboat— one that may help anyone who's coping with the death of a pet.

A retired psychologist in Brooklyn, N.Y., Sife found himself devastated in 1987 after the death of his dachshund, Edel Meister. His training as a mental health professional hadn't prepared him for the grief, and his search for literature on the topic that was geared toward pet owners proved fruitless. So he wrote his own book: *The Loss of a Pet: A Guide to Coping with the Grieving Process When a Pet Dies*. In 1997 he went a step further, founding the Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement (APLB), a nearly all-volunteer nonprofit that serves as a clearinghouse for pet bereavement information, while also offering online chat rooms and training for pet bereavement counselors.

In the interview excerpted below, Sife discusses the APLB's founding and purpose with *Animal Sheltering* associate editor James Hettinger.

Animal Sheltering: How did you come to found the Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement?

Well, I lost my own pet quite a few years ago, quite unexpectedly. He was quite young ... and he was a champion. We were returning home from a show where he just took another blue ribbon, and he started huffing and puffing. It turned out he had congestive heart failure, and probably had no more than three weeks. Which was right on—[at] exactly three weeks, he died. And I was an emotional basket case. Here, of course, I was a retired psychologist with two Ph.D.s in psychology, a professor of psychology, and there was nobody available, at that time, to help me. There were three books written on the subject, none of them written for the pet owner. They were quasi-scholarly works saying that this is a valid subject, and more should be done on it.

So after going through all this and trying to research the literature with great frustration, I finally ended up writing the book I would have wanted for myself.

I understand the book has done very well? It's gone through several printings?

It's to its third printing now. After the second printing, I was giving a lecture and book signing at Barnes and Noble in Manhattan, and a lot of people came up to me and said, "You're in New York, we're in New York. Why don't you form a group?" So I did. I founded the APLB, and we started off slowly. Less than a year later—I knew nothing about the Internet; I didn't even know what e-mail was—I said we've got to go online, so I taught myself everything. The first chat room, I used to sit and play computer games just to keep myself busy, while waiting for somebody to come in. Now, we've got five [chat rooms]. I've started training assistants, and I've created a training course for counselors ... because a lot of people were calling themselves counselors, and they would counsel you with crystals and aromatherapy. I mean, there were a lot of crazies out there, and people were falling for it. I decided I had to legitimize all this and set standards, so I just started teaching.

Generally speaking, what have you found that people need when they lose a pet? What are they looking for?

Validation. That's the first thing. Because today, most people say, "It's only a dog. It's only a cat. Get over it already. What's wrong with you?"

When they bond very strongly with a particular pet, then the bereavement is that much more intensified. And I have a lot of people coming to me saying, "What's wrong with me? I'm grieving more for my cat than I did for my father. And my family is giving me all kinds of hell for it." I say, "No, you're not grieving more; you're grieving differently. Your relationship was different."

I assume that a lot of adults see their pets every day. They don't necessarily see their parents every day.

And a lot of people talk to their pets as if they were their children, and treat them [as such]. In many ways they are our children, because we have to provide everything for them,

and care for them, and watch over them. They can't talk, so we have to be super-cautious just making sure that everything's OK. There's a feedback—a caretaking feedback, it's called—and we become very intensely bonded. Then when the pet dies, [people think], "My God, maybe there's something I could have done that I didn't." Or, "Where did I miss out?" There's a lot of guilt for a while—that's one of the stages.

How can people who run animal shelters and rescue groups benefit from the kind of services you're offering?

Well, these people become bonded also in certain ways to the animals they're dealing with. And if they have to be euthanized, or even if they get adopted after they've attached to them, there's a sense of loss. We've worked with people in wildlife management also. They love the animals, but they have to release them, and then there's always this sense of sadness as well as joy.

Is operating the APLB gratifying work?

Oh, extremely, because—as opposed to other kinds of psychology—if done right, a pet bereavement counselor can [get] very fast results. Very fast—even in the course of one chat room. In my Friday night chat rooms ... in the last half hour, [we have a regular feature where we] share loving memories of our pets. And I have a few pivotal questions, because it's not something you get into easily: "Who had a pet duck? Who had a special toy that most other pets wouldn't have? Whose pet liked to sleep in unusual places?" And it brings them out, and pretty soon they're recalling. I say, "Did you ever have an article of 'people food' suddenly disappear with a pet looking so innocent nearby?" ... It draws them out. And at the end of the chat room, they're falling all over each other trying to tell the stories. People tell me, "I never dreamed I'd be able to smile. My pet just died two days ago. I came in here in tears, and you've got me smiling." That's getting into the healing process. **AS**

Missing Samantha Jane

How the APLB made the loss of a pet more bearable

BY ERICA SETTINO

You might think I would have been better-prepared. I chose to foster Samantha Jane—a 7-year-old Chihuahua diagnosed with late-stage lymphoma, who had been undergoing chemotherapy treatments at the private, nonprofit animal shelter where I worked. Eventually I chose to end her suffering ... which resulted in the beginning of my own.

For almost a full year, Samantha Jane had flourished in our home. Between arduous biweekly chemotherapy treatments at a specialty animal hospital on Long Island, she lived a fun-filled and happy life. Although the chemo took its toll, our top priority was the maintenance of the quality of her life. Weekly trips to the beach, daily belly rubs, countless treats, and limitless love secured trust and formed bonds, taking the edge off her illness. For a short time, we were able to forget that she was so ill. After a happy Christmas together, her immune system, ravaged by disease, continued to betray her small body. The choice was clear.

On the day of her euthanasia, the skies turned gray, and a storm rolled in off the sea. The ferocity of the rain matched that of my tears as we drove to the oncologist. There we said goodbye, grateful that her last breath could take place in my arms as he administered the drug. And although she had been sick for a long time, the loss left me ill-equipped to manage the tumult that followed.

The empathy and validation one receives after the traumatic death of a pet is crucial to the healing process. Too often, when an animal passes away it can be difficult to find the compassion and understanding one would encounter when losing a human companion. Because of this lack of resources, countless pet

mourners run the risk of alienation, isolation, and unresolved pain. Fortunately for me, in my pursuit of guidance from skilled professionals, I happened upon the Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement (APLB).

Psychologist Wallace Sife founded the organization, setting out to serve the community of people mourning the death of their companion animals. When I visited the group's website (aplb.org), I found uplifting testimonials and memorials for countless pets who are missed each day. Immediately, I was drawn into the sense of kinship created by the gentle understanding of raw bereavement. I found myself exploring the services offered, the experiences of others, and the photos of numerous pets whose memories are honored with the sincerity and understanding I had been searching for.

I had been working in the animal welfare field for some time when I lost Samantha Jane. Yet even in my world of people who deeply value animals, I was not immediately able to find resources to help me cope with the loss. While most shelters and rescues may be unable to provide counseling services to grieving pet owners, my experience suggests that animal welfare groups should at least be aware of appropriate resources to suggest to those dealing with the loss of a pet. As organizations devoted to the idea that a pet is part of the family, we should be prepared to help people with their grief when they lose a member of their closest circle.

Shortly after Samantha Jane died, a friend who meant well offered her advice, suggesting I put any pictures of Sam away for a while so that I wouldn't see them and be reminded of my pain. What she couldn't understand was my need to continue to



CHRISTOPHER SETTINO

Samantha Jane

“see” Sam and grieve for her in the way that she truly deserved. It was through her absence that I came to appreciate just how profound her presence had been. I wanted to cry for her, to be reminded of the time we shared and the impact we had on each other. And although the process of grief is uncomfortable, both for the person going through it and for those who bear witness to it, Samantha Jane is worth every tear I shed even now, when I remember her fondly and miss her still.

Erica Settino has worked in animal welfare and advocacy for more than eight years. She is the co-founder and director of Karuna for Animals: Compassion In Action Inc., and author of the children's book I Am Everything And Everything Is Me (set for release in early 2011). She lives in Huntington, N.Y., with her husband and four animal companions. More information can be found at karunaforanimals.com, and her writing can be found at esettino.weebly.com.

Pen Pals

An unusual partnership brings an animal shelter and emergency evacuation site inside prison walls

Necessity, they say, is the mother of invention, and the chaos that followed Hurricane Katrina gave birth to many unexpected partnerships. Some dissolved as a semblance of order returned to the Gulf Coast, but others—like that between The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and a medium-security prison in Louisiana—have grown into beautiful friendships.

In the days and weeks after the 2005 storm, The HSUS's temporary shelter for animals at the Lamar-Dixon Expo Center in Gonzalez, La., filled up with strays and pets rescued from the flooded region. Animals kept coming in, though, and finding suitable shelters—in an area whose animal facilities had been severely impacted by the storm—became a major challenge.

That's when Amanda Smith, a prison administration staff member at the Dixon Correctional Institute (DCI), happened to



Dixon Correctional Institute inmate James Ziegler bathes newly arrived Chiro, a Chihuahua, at the new animal shelter at the Jackson, La., prison.

read a newspaper article about the sheltering needs at Lamar-Dixon, and asked then-warden James "Jimmy" LeBlanc if the prison could help by fostering displaced animals on prison property, which includes 2,500 acres of land and several barns.

LeBlanc, now secretary of Louisiana's Department of Public Safety and Corrections, liked the idea and started talks with the department and The HSUS. Within weeks, 150 dogs and 52 chickens, ducks, and geese rescued from the New Orleans area were on their way to a converted dairy barn on prison property. Eric Davis, director of field services for the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association, assembled a team of volunteers to transport the animals to DCI, where a team of two correctional officers from the prison's canine unit and 10 inmates helped with unloading and setup.

During the next three weeks, 45 cats and another 20 dogs were added to the temporary shelter. Volunteers and inmates fed and watered all the animals, cleaned their cages, and spent time walking the dogs, many of whom were high-energy pit bulls. "These [inmates] would go out there and play Frisbee with them for hours ... walk them, and take care of them, and fuss with them. The inmates were just great," Davis says.

Some of them would keep working with the dogs, even after their shift was over. "A lot of guys really enjoyed it. They said, 'If you ever get dogs, I want to work with them again!' They didn't care how many hours they worked out there at that old barn; they just love animals," recalls warden Steve Rader.

Those were the humble beginnings of a project that's now benefiting the prison's inmates, animals, and East Feliciana Parish (where the prison is located), which has no animal control department or shelter of its own.

Thanks to a \$600,000 grant from The HSUS, and cooperation from the Louisiana State University (LSU) School of Veterinary Medicine, Dixon Correctional Institute is now the site of an emergency evacuation facility and a newly completed animal shelter, with a fully equipped surgical suite, that will serve as the parish's holding facility for strays. The

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public can visit the animal shelter to search for lost animals, as well as to adopt new pets.

Both structures are located inside the prison's secure perimeter. Not only did prisoners provide the labor to build them—they'll also be caring for the animals housed there, cleaning cages and kennels, walking dogs, feeding and grooming the animals, and giving them all some much-needed TLC.

Inmates will staff the 9,375-square-foot emergency shelter—a covered, open-air barn with a capacity of about 300 kennels—in the event of a disaster, when animals can be housed temporarily. The structure, finished in spring 2008, was already put to use, when Hurricane Gustav struck the region that fall. Thirty-three dogs and 39 cats were evacuated from the LaFourche Parish Animal Shelter in Thibodaux and transported to the brand-new emergency shelter at the prison, where inmates bathed and walked dogs, changed kitty litter, and cleaned kennels during the three days the animals stayed in the shelter.

The animal shelter is run jointly by the prison and the LSU veterinary school. Under faculty supervision, students in the school's HSUS-funded shelter medicine program perform spay/neuter surgeries and provide medical care for the shelter's animals.

One correctional officer supervises the shelter, which is staffed by six inmates who were carefully chosen based on their records. "We wanted to get guys that want to do right and want to give back, and we were able to find some good guys that fit the bill," Rader says.

The inmates will benefit from the work as much as the animals will, according to Deb Parsons-Drake, senior director of animal care centers for The HSUS. "[Prison officials] are providing skills to these people, so that when they do get released, they have had 10, 15 years of on-the-job training," she says. "It is a perk, and the prisoners are vying for it, because they have learned how much animal interaction provides comfort, and chills them out, and helps them deal with whatever the problems are that put them in prison in the first place."

The presence of animals at Dixon Correctional Institute has proved to be good for the morale of the prison, renewing the spirits of those offenders who don't get involved in other programs and activities. Just



A small group of carefully screened inmates has been selected to staff the animal shelter at Dixon Correctional Institute, as well as walk and play with the pets. From left, Bryant Hayes, Ron Johnson, and James Ziegler take three dogs out for a romp.

the experience of walking a dog can bring joy and a sense of connection. Maybe that's because the dogs don't judge the men look-

ing after them, even though they're wearing prison uniforms. "They don't care that he's got a number," Rader says. **AS**

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A New Vision from SAWA

BY MAURINE DYER STEVENS, PRESIDENT AND CEO

In 1970, dedicated leaders in animal welfare, care, and control created the Society of Animal Welfare Administrators (SAWA), with the goal of supporting professionals in the field through a variety of programs and services.



Throughout our 40 years of work, we've provided peer-to-peer networking and educational opportunities for people in the animal welfare field,

working to help animal care professionals grow, learn, and excel in this difficult and rewarding work. We've conducted a biennial study on compensation and benefits, which reports data for turnover rates, Asilomar Accords records, website traffic, personnel practices, and operational issues providing information critical for leadership decision making. We developed the process allowing those in the field to be-

come certified animal welfare administrators (CAWAs), a qualification that—due to the rigorous test required for certification—ensures that those who've earned the title are truly leaders and professionals in the field.

Over the past year we've been reexamining and strengthening our mission, working to ensure that we're providing a vision that can help lead the field into the challenges of the work as it is now. The days of the "dogcatcher" are long gone, and we want to ensure that the people leading animal shelters and animal care and control agencies are prepared for the challenges of our particular time. SAWA represents leaders committed to excellence—in fact, that's our new tagline!—who advocate humane ideals through professional advancement, dedication, and best practices. In 2010, our membership grew to more than 620 professional leaders.

As you can see, SAWA has a new, modern brand that reflects our forward-looking, inclusive

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nature—and we're excited about what the new brand says about our direction. The shapes represent "S" for SAWA and incorporate the textures of animals; they even resemble animal tails. The dual forms represent humans and animals, side by side, working together in harmony, and the curves suggest movement and energy—only too appropriate, as SAWA continues to grow.

Even with this design transformation, our objectives remain the same:

- To promote the sharing of information among and within animal welfare and animal care and control agencies.
- To enhance the positive and professional image of animal welfare and animal care and control agencies.
- To provide educational opportunities for members.

A series of articles written by SAWA experts will be appearing in future issues of *Animal Sheltering*. We will feature information on best practices, leadership tips, lessons learned from research, and ideas for your toolkit aimed at saving lives and building animal-friendly communities.

We hope you enjoy this new department and that you'll become part of the solution by joining SAWA (SAWAnetwork.org). Let us hear from you at membership@sawanetwork.org.

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Paw prints. The sultry month of August is referred to as “dog days,” but at the **Oregon Humane Society** last summer it was cats who took center stage at **“Furs Thursday,”** an art event featuring colorful works created by shelter cats **Pablo Purcasso, Jackson Pawllock, Andy Furhol,** and several other



DAVID LYTLE/OREGON HUMANE SOCIETY

gifted felines. The event was inspired by Portland’s monthly **“First Thursday,”** when art galleries in the city’s trendy Pearl District hold open houses in the evening. A designer

carpet gallery in the district hosted the cats’ show, where visitors could acquire not just an original work of art, but the artist as well. The pieces were created by dipping the cats’ paws in “paint” made of milk, cornstarch, tuna water, and food coloring and placing them on a canvas. “Sometimes they would ... do a nice walk across. Other times it was a bit more abstract, kind of swishes in abstract shapes,” says **David Lytle, public affairs manager for OHS.** The sale of the artwork, supplemented by cat-themed paintings by human artists, raised \$500, but more importantly, **three cats were adopted that evening,** including an 11-year-old female who’d been waiting almost two months for a new home.

■ **It’s a jungle out there.**

Chicago is not what you’d call tropical, but that didn’t stop a couple of alligators from making themselves at home in the Chicago River last summer. A volunteer



with the **Chicago Herpetological Society** who goes by **Alligator Bob** was called out twice in August to capture two young American alligators spotted catching some rays on the riverbank. The herpetological society arranged for the rescued reptiles to be transported to sanctuaries in Florida. Bob told the **Chicago Tribune** that catching alligators has become something of a summer ritual for him—he’s rescued more than 70 gators from Wisconsin and Illinois rivers in his 20 years as a volunteer for the society. People frequently wait until warm weather to release animals that have grown too large for them to handle, unconcerned about what will happen to them when winter arrives. “Nothing good would have come from ... being in the river,” says **Cherie Travis, an attorney and executive director of Chicago Animal Care and Control.** It’s illegal to own an alligator under the **Illinois Dangerous Animal Act,** and it’s also a crime to simply abandon an animal. “... I’m willing to forgive you for ... obtaining an animal improperly,” she says. “[B]ut you can’t just turn it loose.”

■ **No bee left behind.** Dogs are notorious for eating far more than just their food. Delectable tidbits include socks, rocks, carpeting, chew toys, Halloween candy, shoes, underwear, and contents of the cat litter box. The list is endless, and many of the items on it land the doggy diner in the animal hospital. One Labrador’s gustatory delight earned her not only a trip to the veterinarian, but also the **2010 Hambone Award,** first prize in **Veterinary Pet Insurance’s** most unusual insurance claim competition. According to VPI’s website, 1-year-old **Ellie,** who lives with **Robert and Sandra Coe in Santee, Calif.,** already had a history of ingesting nonfoodstuffs when she devoured an entire beehive that had recently been sprayed with pesticide. Her owners were unaware of her shenanigans until she started throwing up hundreds of dead bees. They rushed her to the veterinarian, who concluded that the bees were probably dead when Ellie



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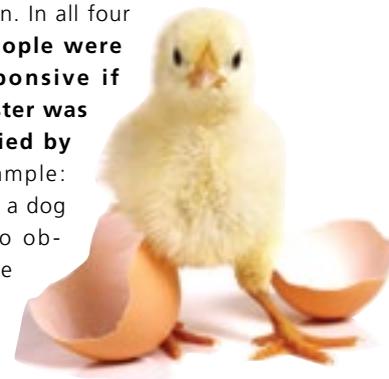


ate them, and she hadn't been stung. The yellow Lab was treated with anti-nausea medication and sent home, no worse for the wear, but she wasn't done relieving herself of the insects—she pooped bees for days. Ellie quickly recovered from her gourmet goof, but there's no telling if she's learned anything from her bad bee-havior. In another tale of erring-doo, The **St. Louis Post-Dispatch** reported that **Steve Wilson**, a poop-scooper for **DoodyCalls Pet Waste Removal Service in St. Louis**, was cleaning up a client's yard one day in June when he noticed something colorful peeping out of one of the products he was removing. Upon closer inspection, Wilson realized it was filthy lucre—**\$58** in bills, to be exact—and returned it to its rightful owner, but not before taking it home to wash it (or rather, to have

his wife wash it). The client, **Karen Linn of Belleville, Ill.**, who assumed that her husband had picked up the cash she'd left on the kitchen counter, wasn't surprised to learn that her **Labradoodle Fossie** had actually eaten it (the 3-year-old pooch scarfed down a bra several months before), but she was astonished to get the cash back from Wilson, freshly cleaned at that. Linn was able to redeem \$28 worth of the pieces of the bills at the bank; the rest was too shredded to be replaced. So she decided to put the remnants to work in another manner—after the story attracted worldwide media attention, she auctioned them off on **eBay** and donated the \$30 proceeds to **The Humane Society of the United States**.

■ **Chick magnet.** Who needs *match.com*? A 2008 study published in **Anthrozoös** by French social psychologist **Nicolas Guegen** found that dogs can be just as effective as a matchmaking service at getting dates for men. Guegen and colleague **Serge Ciccotti** tested the **"dog effect"** in four canine-

assisted experiments designed to see if the presence of a pooch could help you get what you want. Two experiments involved asking strangers for money to catch a bus, another tested strangers' helpfulness in picking up dropped coins, and one measured a man's success in getting telephone numbers from women. In all four studies, **people were more responsive if the requester was accompanied by a dog.** Example: A man with a dog was able to obtain phone numbers from 34 out of 120 women approached; the same man without a dog was only able to cadge 11 numbers. Now, won't that sound good on a cage card—housebroken, good with kids, attracts women! 🐶



CONNECTING PROFESSIONALS WITH ANIMAL WELFARE TOOLS AND RESOURCES



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What's the most amazing animal transformation you've witnessed?

That's the question we asked for this issue's Coffee Break, and you responded by telling us about some turnarounds that remind us that change truly is possible, and that even the most fearful, neglected, and abused animals deserve another chance.



Ollie

Leroy has a new name and a fresh start. Leroy had become anti-social after living alone with an elderly shut-in. When he arrived, Leroy was terrified of everyone and everything. He was the most aggressive cat we had ever seen. His caregivers had to bundle their arms in towels to protect themselves from his swipes. His family remembered a time when Leroy was a friendly, loving boy. But after years of isolation, he had regressed into a fearful cat that his family could not manage. At their wit's end, they called the Cat's Meow for help. Looking in his eyes, we knew that friendly cat was still inside him. Getting that friendly cat out again took some time, effort, and a lot of patience. Three volunteers worked intensively with Leroy and gradually earned his trust. After several months, we were encouraged to see Leroy begin to play, and he would do just about anything for a treat. One Saturday, Susie stopped by the adoption center looking for a cat for her new home. She visited with many of the other cats before getting to Leroy's room. "He picked me out," Susie said. "He was rubbing up against my leg." She started giving him treats and saw the friendly cat we all knew was inside him. She visited Leroy at the adoption center several times a week, letting him get to know her and feel comfortable with her before

taking him home. With his fresh start, Leroy got a new name and is now called Ollie. To ease the transition, Susie started Ollie off in a smaller room. We were all excited to see how he would adjust to his new surroundings. After a couple days, Susie noticed Ollie was spending time in a rocking chair in the room so she went in and sat in it. "He jumped up in my lap, and he flipped over so I could rub his stomach," she said. Everyone, including Susie, was surprised at how quickly Ollie adjusted. He now has a special place near Susie's head where he sleeps every night. Leroy is gone forever, and Ollie is home.

—Michele Onorato, executive director
The Cat's Meow
Anacortes, Washington

Perry came to us from a "sanctuary" that was raided and closed due to abuse and neglect. The big, handsome, black-and-white cat was absolutely terrified. Any change in his routine, even shifting the position of his litter box, would cause panic; every noise or sudden movement made him cringe. Though the door was left open so he could roam our intake room, he was too afraid to step out of his cage. A group of dedicated volunteers (known as Kitty Buddies) worked with Perry to help him become more confident and sociable. Within a few months, he was roaming the shelter and greeting visitors. He remembered how to play, and he'd come running when we called his name! He became a favorite of the volunteers and staff. And just last month, he picked his new family and went to his forever home, where he quickly settled into his new life.

—Joyce Fetterman, Kitty Buddy coordinator
(volunteer)
Good Mews Animal Foundation
Marietta, Georgia

We received a call about a little gray dog who strayed up to a farm site. Filthy, matted, and stinky, she was promptly taken in for much-needed vet care. After shaving down to the skin, she was loaded with tick bites, and was in heat too. What looked like a mini-sheepdog turned out to be a lovely young white schnauzer/poodle mix. She now runs and

plays daily at a prestigious dog park in the Twin Cities, lives a spoiled indoor life, and is the love of her new parents' life!

—Wendy Munsterman, adoption coordinator
Humane Society of Swift County
Benson, Minnesota

Someone dumped a young female rottweiler in the industrial area of Sunland, Calif., in heat, grossly underweight, and scared. She was so frightened of people that she would flatten herself in the corner when you went in to feed her or clean her kennel. After a several weeks, "Sunny" was doing really well. She was wagging and willing to approach. But Beverly [Berger, president of Rottweiler Rescue of Los Angeles] and I both knew she wasn't adoptable, due to her extreme fear of strangers and unknown dogs. A previous adopter, Maureen, had a rottweiler from us who had passed away, and she was ready to adopt another. Walking by Sunny's kennel she asked, "Who's this?" I replied, "No, not that one." But Maureen is not put off that easily, and she politely insisted. Sunny practically climbed into Maureen's lap. She walked nicely on the leash. She sat quietly and attentively at Maureen's side. And that was it for Maureen. With tears in her eyes she announced, "This is the one I want." So Sunny was spayed, vaccinated, microchipped, bathed, and adopted. A few months later, Sunny, now named Ella June, is a new dog! She loves her three housemate kitties, plays with other dogs, and adores the grandchildren and accompanying Maureen to the stable. Our shy, timid, wilted flower has turned into a bright, vivacious, outgoing young woman of a dog.

—Jill Miller, treasurer/co-founder
Rottweiler Rescue of Los Angeles
Pacific Palisades, California

Creamsicle, a white, unneutered male cat with orange patches, lived outdoors in my neighborhood for the entire winter. I would feed him every night in the parking lot. He acted completely feral and would never approach the food until I left. I could not get anywhere near him. He was covered in grease and dirt. Last spring I encountered him a block from the parking lot sunning

himself and rubbing against a tree. I reached down and pet him. Turns out he was completely friendly, extremely affectionate. He was probably badly traumatized when he was abandoned by his previous owners, and then trust burst through again. He is now in a new home. He is clean, neutered and, best of all, with people he can trust forever.

—Kathleen Goward, treasurer
A Tale at a Time Inc.
Brooklyn, New York



Dagny

Garland was an anxious dog and scared dog who was not adopted from the shelter for almost two years. She showed aggression toward other dogs, but she was always wonderful with people. A couple saw her online and couldn't bear the thought of her staying at the shelter any longer. She went into their home and was renamed Dagny for a new start. She would become a dog-loving, water-splashing, fun-hunting pooch in just a matter of months. She went from fearful and despondent to confident and contented much faster than we expected. She is a much-loved friend and family member.

—Laura McKelvey, animal care specialist
PAWS Atlanta
Decatur, Georgia

Congratulations to Laura McKelvey, whose submission was selected in a random drawing from those published in this issue. Her organization, PAWS Atlanta, will receive a free coffee break: a \$50 gift certificate to a local coffee shop. "Bone" appetit!

Check out the latest Coffee Break question and 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.

THE CITY OF CALGARY ANIMAL SERVICES

A License to Succeed

Calgary's program brings in money and saves
lives by showing the value of those metal tags

BY JAMES HETTINGER





CALGARY ANIMAL & BYLAW SERVICES

BILL BRUCE SPEAKS SENSIBLY and doesn't have to carry a big stick: The licensing program he's created in his community in Alberta, Canada, has helped the "stick" side of the department's animal control work—enforcement—become secondary.

The work Bruce and his department have done in the city of Calgary can serve as a guide to any municipal agency that's struggled to get the public to understand and buy in to the concept of licensing. Where many cities struggle to get even dog owners to license their pets, in Calgary both dogs and cats must be licensed—and the revenue produced largely covers the cost of providing animal services for a city of 1.1 million people and 500 square miles. Bruce also reports high return-to-owner rates and low euthanasia numbers.

The money collected from licensing goes back into animals rather than into the city's general revenue fund, Bruce notes, so at budget time he doesn't have to compete against other departments. Licensing dollars fund the city shelter and its medical clinic, a free spay/neuter program for low-income people, and programs devoted to getting pets adopted, reuniting pets and owners, resolving animal-related disputes, and providing emergency medical care for injured pets.

Calgary Animal & Bylaw Services has an annual operating budget of about \$5.4 million, of which 80 to 85 per-



Animal health technician Lisa Madson holds a shelter kitty at the Calgary shelter. Cat licensing wasn't a popular idea when the city first broached it, but with proper education and marketing, it's become a hit.

cent comes from licensing. The remainder is generated by adoption fees, impound fees, and fines, but Bruce insists that heavy-handed enforcement is the last resort: "You only write a ticket if you've tried everything else first."

Bruce cites that shift away from a ticket-writing mentality as crucial to the city's success: His department has moved toward a "value-based" model of community engagement, where citizens feel compelled to be more responsible pet owners because they see the worth of the services they're paying for.

A longtime city employee who previously worked in traffic engineering, Bruce says when he first visited local animal shelters, he noticed that many of the cats were friendly enough to be picked up and held. Likewise, many of the dogs in the kennels would obey commands to sit. Observing these realities, Bruce concluded that the primary issue in his town was clearly a human one. "Our problem is responsible pet ownership," he says. "Every animal in a shelter or on the street is probably there because a human relationship failed. ... So then I thought, 'We need to find more ways to support the relationships.' "

And when it came to pitching the public on the value of pet licenses, it was emphasizing those relationships that helped the department deliver the message.

Adding Value

Most jurisdictions have some form of animal licensing, Bruce says, but few do it well.

His advice for a jurisdiction thinking of starting or improving a licensing program is simple: Show people what the license will do for them—and for their pets.

Calgary didn't start with the best approach, initially focusing on enforcement. Officers spent a lot of energy on license renewals, and the approach had limited success in increasing compliance.

People generally "don't like to be told what to do, so when you see campaigns that say, 'License your dog. It's the law'—that is not gonna attract people," Bruce says. But he contends that most people will comply with a law when they see a positive impact, such as more owners being reunited with their pets. "So we wanted to shift it and actually create a license system where you would want to license your pet because it brings value, not because it's the law," he explains. The department created an advertising campaign in which animals proclaimed, "My licence is my ticket home."

Getting people to realize that a tag might save their animal's life makes the concept of licensing much more positive. "The whole focus of responsible pet ownership is a campaign for something, rather than against," says Patricia Cameron, executive director of the Calgary Humane Society, a nonprofit that partners with city animal services on a variety of programs. "After many decades and decades of working against animal abuse, neglect, and abandonment, we just know that doesn't work, and we're focusing



Calgary promotes licenses as the "ticket home" for lost animals. Officer Melissa Millette returns a dog to Karen Kelly after a stay in the shelter.

on a positive thing, which is the positive characteristics of pet ownership."

Bruce credits his predecessor, Jerry Aschenbrenner, with being one of the first officials to see that licensing, in addition to turning the city's animal services into a self-funded entity, could boost the return-to-owner rate. Dog licensing in Calgary began in earnest more than 20 years ago; cat licensing has trod a somewhat rockier path but is now widely accepted.

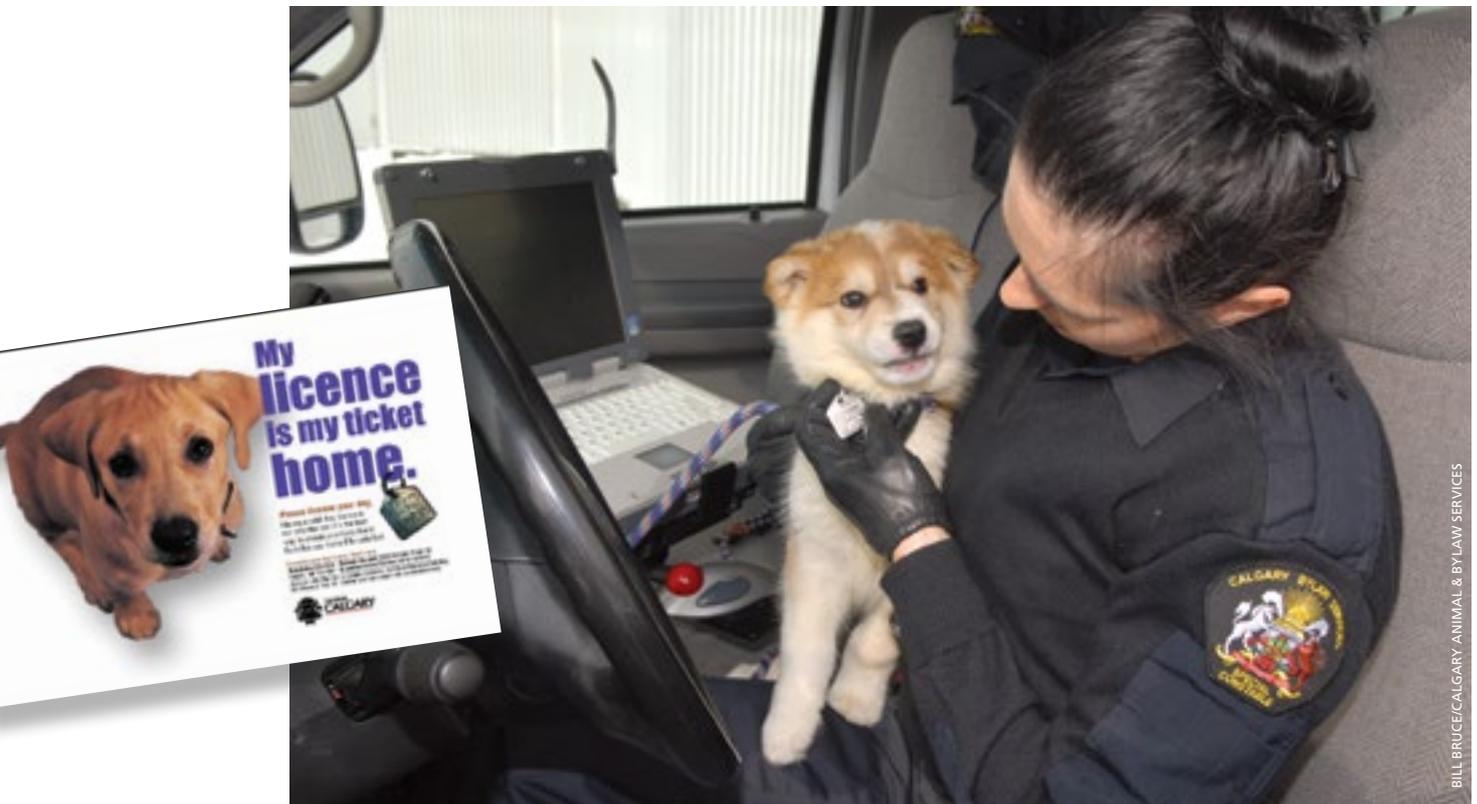
Calgary first considered requiring licenses for cats back in the 1990s. The effort predates his time as animal services director, but Bruce recalls that the idea sparked a passionate response. Hundreds of citizens objected and picketed city hall—citing everything from collar-choking concerns to an alleged centuries-old royal decree giving cats special status for their role in killing rats and stopping the plague. "Just what every council member wants," Bruce jokes. "Hundreds of angry people that want to talk to *you*."

That experience left a bad taste in people's mouths, so Bruce tried a more collaborative approach when he resurrected the idea in the mid-2000s. He formed a committee that included the Calgary Humane Society, local rescue groups, veterinarians, breeders, and animal fanciers—people who shared the desire to get lost and stray animals home and reduce unnecessary euthanasias.

The group "really dissected the cat issue," Bruce says, and discovered that in 2005 more than 9,000 cats were sheltered by city animal services and nonprofit groups, but only 17 percent had identification.

It was clearly a huge part of the problem. "The ones with ID generally go home," Bruce explains. "The rest don't do so well." The committee went to the media, he says, "and explained that this is the situation in Calgary, and really asked





BILL BRUCE/CALGARY ANIMAL & BYLAW SERVICES

Calgary animal services officer Nikeae Michalchuk checks the license of a lost dog. Mandatory licensing for dogs and cats in the city has boosted return-to-owner rates and promoted responsible pet ownership.

... 'Calgarians, are you OK with that?' Because if the answer is, 'Yes, that's fine that that many cats get euthanized,' then I guess our work is done. But you know what? We knew it wasn't fine, and the people spoke out loud and clear."

Bruce says the committee spent two years consulting, educating the public, and mulling its options.

Its educational efforts involved distributing "Identification is your cat's ticket home" posters, pushing the message via newsletters and local talk shows, holding open houses, and conducting surveys. By the time the cat licensing proposal went before the city council, Bruce says, 85 percent of the public supported it. Animal services had aimed to license 20,000 cats in the program's first year; it wound up licensing 31,000.

Calgary now requires all dogs and cats to be licensed at age 3 months, and the fine for failing to comply is \$250. Dogs must wear their license tags when they're off their owners' property. Licensed cats must wear their tag or have a readable microchip or a legible tattoo.

About 90 percent of the dogs (more than 100,000) and more than half the cats (about 50,000) in Calgary have licenses, Bruce says, and the resulting revenue "virtually runs the place."

But the results of such a high-compliance program are greater than a financial boost for the animal services department.

In any community, Bruce notes, there's a strong correlation between licensing and return-to-owner rates. Dogs and cats in Calgary are issued stainless-steel tags that have an ID number and city phone numbers for finders to call. If an officer picks up a stray animal with a tag, he can find the owner by typing the tag number into a computer linked to the central office. If the animal isn't wearing a tag, the officer can type in a tattoo number or scan him for a microchip. "He'll get you on the phone and say, 'Good afternoon, Mr. Smith. I have Buster in my truck. He seems to have gotten out. Can I bring him home?' And nobody ever says no, so we drive him straight home," Bruce says. "About 30 percent of our dogs get driven straight home—they don't even come to a shelter."

The value of the licensing program is evident in the numbers it has produced.

In 2009, Calgary impounded 4,291 dogs, returning 86 percent to their owners, adopting out 9 percent, and euthanizing only 5 percent.

Cat licensing took effect Jan. 1, 2007, and quickly made an impact. The city's return-to-owner rate for impounded cats rose from 39 percent in 2006 to 56 percent in 2008. Meanwhile, the euthanasia rate dropped from 37 percent in 2006 to 18 percent in 2008. Those numbers stand in stark contrast to Canada as a whole, Bruce says, where the return-to-owner rate is about 2 percent and the euthanasia rate about 74 percent.

Bruce credits the licensing program's success to the collaborative spirit in Calgary—a sentiment echoed by some of the community's animal welfare advocates.

"We're all able to work together, and we complement the different strengths that each organization brings," says Kelly Hyde-Wein, board chair of the MEOW Foundation, a rescue group that operates a trap-neuter-return (TNR) program for feral cats.

Calgary does not require feral cats to be licensed—a requirement that would make the MEOW Foundation's TNR program logistically difficult, she explains. She notes that Bruce put a lot of thought into the city's animal bylaws, structuring them so that they work not just for the city but for the animals and local rescue groups. "We're able to do what we do with trap-neuter-return because of how Bill handles his licensing."

Making it Work

While getting public buy-in is crucial for a successful licensing program, you also have to sweat the small stuff.

Bruce advises jurisdictions to examine potential barriers: A mandatory spay/neuter law, for example, might cause people who can't afford the surgery to skip getting a license out of fear their intact pets will be detected. A limit on the number of pets someone is allowed to own also discourages licensing, Bruce says; if an owner has four pets but the law only allows three, he won't license them.

The folly of pet limits, he adds, is that an owner of four well-behaved Yorkies who weigh 35 pounds total is breaking the law, while down the street the owner of three enormous, vicious, out-of-control dogs is in compliance. Calgary focuses its animal services on the behavior side of the equation, Bruce says. "Your dog's not a problem, your cat's not a problem, until it causes someone a problem. So nothing's arbitrary—everything has that rationale to it."

The department also works to ensure that the licensing process stays affordable and convenient. Annual license fees are \$31 for neutered dogs, and \$52 if the animals are intact. For cats, the fees are \$10 for neutered, \$30 for intact.

A key to calculating fees, Bruce says, is to consider the "tipping point"—the point at which people will consider the cost too expensive and stop complying. He looks at the region's consumer price index and cost of living to determine a comfortable rate. "If it's too expensive, it becomes another barrier" to licensing and thus to responsible pet ownership, he explains. "... I try to stay a good \$5 back from the tipping point, so in times of recessionary roller coasters like we're on now, my licensing is going up every year, not dropping."

Bruce recalls visiting one jurisdiction that only issued animal licenses weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and not at lunchtime. The schedule prompted him to wonder how people with jobs would ever get licenses.

Calgary seeks to make it easier by offering people a variety of options. People can pay for a pet license in person



Bill Bruce, director of Calgary's animal services department, says he wants people to get their pets licensed because they see the value the program delivers—not simply because it's the law. Proudly wearing a license is Bruce's dog Amy, adopted from the Calgary shelter eight years ago.

at two locations, online, by telephone, by mail, through a night depository box at city hall, or even by flagging down a humane officer. Renewal notices are sent out automatically, and staff follows up with all owners who fail to renew. Impounded dogs and cats cannot leave the shelter without a license, and adopted animals get a six-month license for free.

Such details may seem small, but they can make a difference to the community an agency is trying to serve; they demonstrate that the animal services department understands the realities of people's lives.

It's all part of a collaborative spirit that, Cameron says, is greater in Calgary than any other community she's aware of. Many animal welfare groups elsewhere, she notes, engage in mutual finger-pointing and adopt the attitude that "We save animals better than you." But the cat licensing process in Calgary has brought groups together, making them more aware of each other's programs and particular skills, and the potential to help each other when shelters and foster homes are full. "I think more lives have been saved as a result of collaboration." 



.....**SWEATING**.....

the Small Stuff

What does it take to run a progressive, lifesaving animal shelter?
HSUS Shelter Services teams provide a tailored road map

BY JULIE FALCONER



A CAR CREEPS UP to the Dallas animal shelter one Tuesday evening, pausing in the shadows just beyond the security lights. The engine idles while a young woman, clasping a small bundle against her T-shirt, exits the passenger side and walks quickly to the after-hours animal depository, a bank of metallic gray boxes attached to the main building. A minute later, she's back in the car, empty-handed, and the vehicle disappears into the night.

Similar scenarios repeat until, 90 minutes after closing time, five dogs fill the drop boxes flanking the Lost and Found entrance. Two young Lab mixes huddle together in the recesses of one enclosure, while a fluffy black pooch, wild-eyed and defensive, charges the door in another.

On the front of each box is an intake form; the spaces for the owner's name, contact information, and reasons for giving up the animal are all empty. Only two sheets include a pet's name scrawled in the upper right corner. Gunther is a wirehaired gray terrier looking worried in the top row. Below him, a rhinestone-collared Chihuahua named Estrella trembles with fear.

Inside the Dallas Animal Services facility, the evening shift staff periodically removes animals from the drop boxes, making room for the next batch. A dispatcher routes cruelty calls, animal bite reports, and other emergencies to field officers scattered throughout the city. And on the opposite end of the building, a meeting led by a shelter evaluation team—comprising Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) staff and other sheltering professionals from across the country—is under way.

"Just walking through the shelter this afternoon, I see so many animals that are owner-surrendered, and I just don't get it," says a member of the shelter's citizen advisory board, addressing the experts listening sympathetically at the front of the conference room.

Others in the audience voice similar frustrations. Uninformed or uncommitted pet owners; abandonment, cruelty, and neglect; people who deny that their pet's litters contribute to overpopulation—these are tragic realities in communities across the nation. And based on the team's conversations with city officials and shelter staff earlier in the day, it's clear that Dallas has its share of these problems.

When the meeting adjourns, evaluation team member Shandra Koler walks past the off-hours depository and stops to peer inside the compartments. Thirteen more dogs, cats, and kittens have entered the boxes—joining the ranks of



ALL PHOTOS: MICHELLE RILEY/THE HSUS

shelter evaluations

the more than 36,000 animals who pass through this facility each year.

Koler makes notes on a pad of paper and follows her group to the parking lot. From now until half past midnight, she and her teammates have a lot to discuss.

A Profession Like No Other

To an outsider, the job of caring for a community's homeless pets can appear deceptively simple. But animal sheltering, as anyone in the field will affirm, is not like any other job.

Modern shelters incorporate a variety of social welfare functions under one roof: housing for the homeless, emergency room, adoption agency, domestic abuse haven, runaway hotline, food bank, mediation service, and family planning center. For shelters that also enforce animal cruelty and control laws, the elements of police work and neighborhood peacekeeping are added to the mix.

The estimated 3,500 shelters in the U.S. are their own independent entities, and they are not subject to any man-



They're not the shelter police, but the evaluation team could be deemed the shelter detectives. Here, Carolyn Machowski, HSUS manager of shelter services, observes Dallas animal services officers impounding a dog at the city's shelter.

datory universal standards or regulations. Whether operating as private nonprofits or government agencies, shelters vary widely in their leadership, animal care practices, and services to the community, with critical differences in size, facilities, budget, and staffing.

It's a tenet in the profession that animal shelters typically reflect the overarching socioeconomic, educational, and attitudinal realities of the communities they serve—particularly the prevailing feelings and practices related to animals. In some locales, the passion many people feel for helping homeless animals eventually leads to modern, pro-

gressive shelters buoyed by government support and committed donors and volunteers. But that same passion can also manifest in public suspicion about a shelter's operations. Sometimes, the concerns are warranted and can bring about positive change, but if handled poorly, they can cause rifts both internal and external.

This wild-card nature of community involvement is often a surprise to those just entering the field. Bruce Roney, who has twice served on HSUS evaluation teams, recalls laughing when Ottawa Humane Society board members asked during his job interview how he handles emotionally or politically charged issues. While Roney's background in nonprofit governance, fundraising, and policy development gave him a good start, he had no experience in animal sheltering. "I said, 'Listen, I'm coming from HIV and AIDs [work]. What could be more politically charged and emotional than that?'" says Roney, the shelter's executive director. "Well, little did I know, that would be animal welfare."

It's into these polarized environments that Carolyn Machowski and other staff in The HSUS's Shelter Services program must sometimes wade, giving the public an outlet for their concerns and using the final report as a tool for identifying both positive aspects of a shelter's operations and areas for improvement. Whether a shelter is doing the best it can with limited resources or hampering its own potential through poor decision-making and lack of focus, managers and staff stand a much better chance of improvement when animal advocates in the community are on their side.

With a long background in animal care, including 15 years as kennel operations supervisor for a municipal shelter in Baltimore, Machowski knows how hard it is for shelters to achieve success on all fronts. The all-too-common realities of too many animals, too few staff, not enough money, and the emotional rigors of the work can prevent many employees from seeing the big picture, she says. "You're focused on putting out fires and getting through yet another day of more animals coming in, and not enough space and not being able to find homes for them," she says. "And sometimes you need to step back and have an objective evaluation of your policies, procedures, and day-to-day activities."

The HSUS has offered that service since 1992, with the goal of reducing animal suffering and euthanasia by helping shelters tackle the roots of pet homelessness in their communities.

No Shelter is an Island

Before her plane touched down at Love Field, Machowski spent months preparing for the evaluation of Dallas Animal Services, a municipal animal care and control agency with about 130 employees.

She talked with local officials, shelter leaders, and community animal advocates. She studied staff charts, field reports, call logs, job descriptions, public comments, and the

city's animal ordinances. And she recruited experts from both government-run and private shelters to join her in Dallas.

During the site visit, the team members talk with employees at every level of operations, and accompany them as they perform their jobs. It's an intense undertaking, not only for the evaluators but also for the staff.

At introductory meetings on the first day, Machowski emphasizes the collaborative nature of the assignment: The evaluation is not an indictment. The team is not the shelter police. At the same time, they won't sugarcoat their findings. The purpose is to make the agency the best it can be—for the animals, the staff, and the community.

And she reminds the staff that the evaluators are their peers, people who understand the difficulties of their work. While shelters can be strong catalysts for change and develop progressive programs that create new hope for homeless animals, staff often feel blamed for the crisis of pet overpopulation. "We all know that's not the case," Machowski says to the Dallas employees. "The problems are happening out in the community, and you guys have to try to resolve [them]."

Throughout the four-day Dallas site visit, the community's role in the shelter's challenges is seldom out of view. Situated on a knoll in an industrial area near two highway interchanges, the 52,000-square-foot facility is divided into two wings. The adoptions entrance on the left opens into a spacious center with skylights and glassed-in enclosures where cats scamper up kitty condos or nestle in cushioned beds. It's the peaceful side of the building; the lobby is quiet and often empty. Meanwhile, the doors to the Lost and Found lobby open and close for a steady march of visitors: people surrendering family pets, owners searching for a lost dog or cat, and the occasional Good Samaritan dropping off a stray. Even with three people working the intake counter, there's usually a wait.

On the second day of the HSUS team's site visit, a woman seated near the soda machine is quietly weeping, waiting to hand over the longhaired gray cat in the carrier at her feet. Another woman with a stray cat to deliver looks hopeful as she scans the lost pet notices on the bulletin board. "Is this a calico?" she asks, holding up a cardboard box with a gray-striped tabby inside.

Leaving the facility is a young couple with a crate full of pit-bull mix puppies balanced between them. After a shelter employee explained that the animals might be euthanized because of the large number of similar puppies in the shelter, the couple has changed their minds about dropping them off. As they exit, the woman announces that she'll take the animals elsewhere and put up a "free" sign.

Next in line: two children and a man holding a tattered leash attached to a large mixed breed with a dirty coat and a hint of St. Bernard in her face. Splayed on the floor, the dog hugs the tile with her belly and paws, refusing to budge. Father and daughter giggle at each failed attempt to drag her toward the intake counter. The son sits cross-legged on

the floor, holding a brindle-colored puppy by the hind legs and propelling the animal forward wheelbarrow-style.

Their dog has given birth and is pregnant again, the girl explains to an employee. A member of a rescue group overhears the conversation and offers a free spay surgery if the family will keep her. The man shakes his head and makes a dismissive gesture. They still have two of the dog's puppies at home; they don't want four dogs. After the paperwork is signed, a stony-faced kennel worker takes the cringing dog and her pup through the doors leading to the kennels at the back of the building.

Koler sits in a corner of the lobby, observing the dynamics at play. An animal health technician with Animal Control Services in Cleveland since 1999, she's no stranger to the stresses faced by shelter workers on the front lines. During brief lulls in the action, she asks about policies and looks over the shoulder of a worker entering information into a computer. The rest of the time, her attention is focused on how the staff handle the parade of people and pets coming through the door.

The People Paradox

Dallas Animal Services is working to alter the cultural mindsets that help generate this constant stream of stray and surrendered animals. At a class in responsible pet ownership, outreach coordinator Lisa Fullerton delivers some hard truths to owners of unsterilized pets. "The City of Dallas euthanizes over 28,000 dogs and cats a year," she tells the half dozen people at Wednesday's session. "That's just this facility. It doesn't include the county, and frankly they're just as bad. Our 12 puppy kennels are full year-round. Each year, 10,000 people are born versus 70,000 puppies and kittens." She speaks emphatically but rushes through the script so there'll be time for questions at the end—when she typically counters common misconceptions about pet sterilization.

More than 800 people have taken the class since October 2008. "There's a lot of 'aha' moments," Fullerton says. "... I've never had anyone not shocked when it comes to the numbers on spay/neuter."

Still, in a city of 1.2 million, she knows that change will not happen overnight. In the meantime, Fullerton and her co-workers grapple with the real suffering that results from unplanned litters.

Like people in other caregiving professions, shelter employees are vulnerable to compassion fatigue, a mental disorder likened to post-traumatic stress syndrome. Common symptoms include depression, apathy, hopelessness, and anger.

Unaddressed, compassion fatigue can lead to dysfunctional teams, high turnover, or situations like the one Karen Stimpson discovered when she became executive director of the Coastal Humane Society in Brunswick, Maine. The staff at the time had the conviction that "no one was going to be a good adoptive parent," says Stimpson, whose shelter was evaluated in 2010. "So everyone was greeted, if they were greeted at all, with a

surliness factor. And then they would have to beg to adopt an animal, and chances were they wouldn't make the cut."

Much of the attitude the public sometimes encounters at shelters derives from the stress of making life-and-death decisions every day. Even disinfection and vaccination protocols are much more than simple exercises in cleanliness and good health; animals in tight quarters can quickly spread disease that adds to their suffering and makes them less adoptable. And in many communities, despite concerted marketing efforts and collaboration with local rescue groups, certain animals are passed over repeatedly as an endless number of new pets streams in. Eventually, when no room and no money remain to care for or treat those still left behind, the problems created by society at large fall into the hands of one person: the euthanasia technician.

At the Dallas agency, shelter evaluation team member Jennifer Landis is assigned to assess the shelter's protocols for this critical function. A veterinarian with the Arizona Humane Society in Phoenix, which takes in 45,000 animals a year, she isn't daunted by the volume of animals in Dallas, and she understands the heartbreaking decisions shelters must sometimes make. Joining the evaluation team has given her an opportunity to help change that reality.

In a room off a back hallway where the procedure is performed, Landis gauges whether the shelter's euthanasia technicians are attentive to minimizing fear and discomfort in the animals. At the same time, she's assessing the working conditions for the staff who perform this difficult task. Are they well-trained in administering the drugs? Does the workload allow them to move at a gentle, unhurried pace? Are they allowed to opt out of euthanasia when they're feeling burned out? Are other staff supportive of them?

Peer Review

While they're not shelter police, the evaluation team could be deemed shelter detectives.

From the way the kennels drain to the type of cat litter used, no detail is too small to delve into. Kennel and cage dimensions, temperature and humidity in animal housing areas and the cargo compartments of field services vehicles, and noise levels in kennel rooms are all measured and recorded. The meticulousness is warranted: In animal sheltering, seemingly trivial mistakes—such as improper dilution of a germicide—can hurt animals or otherwise impact the entire operation.

At meal times and late in the evenings, the team members pool their information and observations. Conversations typically launch with "What's your take on ..." or "How is the shelter handling ..."—followed by a barrage of voices and fingers flipping through notepads.

The dynamics among frontline staff, supervisors, and municipal officials are analyzed. Community outreach programs are examined. The agency's practices and policies are compared with those of other shelters. Topics range from the pros and cons of 311 call systems (handling non-



Shelters are often so focused on the details of their daily work—from cleaning the cat cages to issuing citations to helping reunite lost pets with their owners—that it can be helpful to get a glimpse of the bigger picture.

emergency, animal-related calls to the city), to procedures for buying rooster chow to feed the victims of a recent cock-fighting bust, to the contents of the unlabeled metal buckets in the off-loading bay where field officers bring in animals (flea powder, team member Paul Studivant reveals).

Studivant, division chief of St. Johns County Animal Control in Florida, describes his day with the agency's "sweep teams"—field services crews assigned to remove stray dogs from targeted districts. Mike Oswald, director of Multnomah County Animal Services in Oregon, leafs through budget printouts for an answer to Machowski's question about allocation of dog licensing revenue.

Through the constant give-and-take, the big picture of Dallas' operations gradually takes shape. At the same time, the evaluators are adding to their knowledge base, gaining tips they can apply to their own shelter operations back home.

The principle of learning from others' experiences is the foundation of the HSUS evaluation program. Contemporary best practices in animal sheltering have been developed and refined over many years and by multiple individuals and organizations. And the standards are always evolving to incorporate new technologies, innovative programs, and the latest research on animal housing, handling, and disease control.

The standards are also flexible enough to accommodate varying resource levels. "We're not going to recommend that a tiny rural shelter that can barely feed and clean needs to open a spay/neuter clinic the next month," says HSUS Shelter Services director Kim Intino. Instead, shelter staff might be advised to reach out to a local vet for help with the surgeries. "There need to be adjustments, and it needs to be by someone who understands the challenges."

In the ideal scenario, these peer recommendations help an already well-functioning agency learn to function even

better. In other cases, they act as a powerful impetus for change in municipalities with budgets that reflect the attitudes of a bygone era, when animal control and municipal pounds existed solely to dispose of stray dogs at as little cost to the community as possible. In such situations, the evaluation findings can persuade the local government that humane sheltering is a public responsibility—and provide the precise road map needed to move the agency to a better model.

In 2003, Intino led an assessment of a county-run shelter in North Carolina where three officers handled field response, and a single employee cared for more than 7,000 animals a year. In no uncertain terms, she told county leaders the staffing level wasn't close to adequate and urged them to hire more employees immediately. She backed up the statement with a chart based on formulas developed by the National Animal Control Association.

Fortunately, the county manager wanted to overhaul the shelter. Intino's recommendations gave him leverage to do so. County officials approved the hiring of more staff and agreed to replace the old facility, which resembled a shed more than a shelter. The new building, dubbed the Animal Adoption and Education Center to signify its commitment to serving animals and the community, opened in 2008.

The Greatest Gift

Sometimes the problems are less glaring—though not necessarily less challenging.

How do other shelters do this? Each time Stimpson of the Coastal Humane Society discussed finances and operations during a retreat with her board of directors last year, they kept returning to that question.

The need for an outside perspective led her to the HSUS, and in March, Machowski and a team of experts traveled to Maine for an evaluation. "I'm still astonished by all we learned," Stimpson says. Soon after, she and her staff cleared out years' worth of excess clutter, repainted the lobby, and removed negative and distracting signs papering the walls. The lobby is now airy and professional; visitors can focus on the animals instead of the chaotic décor.

Stimpson came to the job with a passion for animals and a background in fundraising and nonprofit administration, but she had no shelter experience. The evaluators encouraged the board to invest in her education about the field, she says. Other changes included revised cleaning and vaccination protocols, new partnerships with rescue groups, revamped rabbit housing, and new staff trainings—all before a final report had been delivered.

"The evaluation process and report is the greatest gift an executive director can ask for, because it puts some tooth behind the changes that are sometimes difficult to make through the staff and through the board," Stimpson says. "... It's taking the guesswork out of it."

Other HSUS evaluations have set in motion similar turnarounds. Following an assessment that spurred a change

in leadership and increased funding at the Miami-Dade Animal Services Department, adoptions have tripled, animal care has vastly improved, animal rescue partnerships have grown to 60, and in 2009, volunteers donated more than 13,000 hours, says director Sara Pizano. And at Orange County Animal Services in North Carolina, delivery of a Shelter Services report aligned with community concern and board support, marking "a moment in the transition of animal sheltering and animal welfare in Orange County," says director Bob Marotto. Local officials increased the county's role in sheltering: They established Animal Services and hired Marotto to lead it, and they committed to building a facility and implementing pet sterilization and adoption programs—frequently consulting HSUS recommendations to gauge progress.

Before Dallas Animal Services can engage in similar self-reflection, The HSUS team still has a lot of work to do. Once back home, they'll continue comparing notes, gathering documentation, and posing tough questions: Are the shelter staffing levels and quality of animal care adequate? What kind of training exists for employees? Is there an accountability process in place for managers? How well do employees interact with the public? Are sufficient resources devoted to community outreach and education?

Answers will be compiled in a comprehensive report for city officials—the first step in a process that requires long-term commitment from all parties. Like other shelters before it, Dallas will be advised to form an implementation task force, and HSUS Shelter Services staff will remain partners in the endeavor, a resource to call upon in the years to come.

Evaluations often result in some recommendations that may take months or years to implement—or to have a measurable impact. But other changes are set in motion before HSUS teams even depart for the airport. At the wrap-up meetings that typically conclude site visits, evaluators summarize their findings and list issues shelter leaders should address before final reports are delivered.

In Dallas, that meeting will mark the end of a productive week that started with a straightforward request from city officials: "Give us things we can fix, and tell us how we can fix them."

Four days later, the team enters the city's downtown office buildings, prepared to do just that. 

The Shelter Services program of The Humane Society of the United States understands the challenges that shelters face—whether they are large or small, government or nonprofit, rural or urban. Animal care and control agencies often struggle to find the necessary balance between community expectations and available resources. Shelter Services can help organizations acquire the tools they need for long-term stability and success. For more information, go to animalsheltering.org/shelter_services, or contact the program's staff at 202-452-1100; shelterevaluations@humanesociety.org.

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Can You Hear Me Now?

Shelters turn down the volume with nifty design, cool construction, and enrichment programs

BY JIM BAKER



BRENT ISENBERGER PHOTOGRAPHY/ISENBERGERPHOTO.COM

Noise-control measures at the Animal Rescue League of Iowa include full-height dog enclosures with Plexiglass fronts, which prevent sound transmission better than typical runs, reducing overstimulation and promoting better behavior.

When the Potter League for Animals moved into its sparkling new \$7.2 million facility in Middletown, R.I., in 2009, it was everything that executive director M. Christie Smith had ever wanted in a shelter.

Designed by ARQ Architects of Kittery, Maine, a small firm that specializes in animal care facilities, the new shelter was modern, spacious, and even LEED Gold Certified, the first shelter in the country to attain that benchmark for green buildings.

It was also missing something.

“The morning after we moved all the dogs in, I was standing in the lobby, and

I went, ‘This is unbelievable, I can’t hear anything,’” Smith recalls. She had a staff member go and find a specific dog who was known to be noisy, and do something to make the dog bark. “So they got this dog barking, and I could hardly hear it. ... It was so much quieter.”

That’s when Smith realized the one thing her cutting-edge shelter was lacking: the racket of barking dogs.

Noise control is a major issue in shelters, where the wail and woof of stressed-out dogs provides an often-inescapable soundtrack to daily existence. It’s a problem for staff and

volunteers, who have to spend hours each day working in a painfully—and potentially dangerously—loud environment. It’s a turn-off for potential adopters, who might rather flee than endure the din. And the sonic assault is hard on the animals—not just dogs, but cats and other species, too. But it doesn’t have to be that way.

Smith is still adjusting to the tranquility at the new Potter League facility. At the old shelter, when the kennel was full and the dogs started barking, the noise level could hit 115 decibels, making it impossible to talk to adopters while they were looking at the dogs.

(For comparison, 120 decibels is roughly equal to the noise made by a jet airplane taking off, according to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association.) Smith says it's still instinctive for her to tell visitors, "Before you go in to look at the dogs, I need to have a conversation with you.' It's taking me a while to realize that is no longer true."

It's no accident that her shelter is calm and quiet: Noise control was part of the plan from the earliest stages of development, says Smith, who recognized that the loud factor had been a problem at the old facility. But even if your agency is a long way from having the funds to build a state-of-the-art facility, there are things you can do to bring the local shrill-o-meter back into the healthy range.

So before you resign yourself to noisy kennels as a simple fact of life, and spend the next few years wearing earplugs and lip-reading with your colleagues at work, know this: It doesn't have to be that way. Thanks to creative architectural design, a wide range of building products with improved acoustic qualities, and operational measures that can calm even the craziest kennel, shelters around the country are discovering that their kennel riots can get much more quiet.

Going Acoustic

If you are on the verge of constructing a new building—or if you're thinking about it—you're in an ideal position to do something

about noise. Shelter design experts agree: Acoustics should be a major consideration right from the start of planning.

The beauty of new construction is that architects and engineers are starting with a blank sheet of paper. They can specify exactly what they need in order to achieve good noise control, without the need to change their plans in order to work around an existing structure or to minimize disruption to shelter operations. "There's usually no compromises," says Scott Learned, president of Design Learned Inc., a Norwich, Conn., engineering firm that designs building systems for shelters, veterinary hospitals, and kennels.

The only downside, says Learned, is that clients are often shocked at the cost of building a shelter that will do everything they want it to. "They're thinking, 'Oh, well, an office building costs 120 bucks a square foot.' These buildings cost 250 bucks a square foot. And that is the part that's tough to get over with new construction," Learned says. But for those who've got the cash to spend, he says, "We can *guarantee* an odor-free, noise-free—or greatly noise-mitigated—environment. I have places with hundreds of dogs that are almost dead silent."

Given the freedom to start over and design a new shelter, Smith and ARQ made major changes to the way Potter League houses its dogs. For example, they



The Potter League houses its dogs in individual, indoor/outdoor rooms that use laminated glass (both clear and translucent panels) in anodized aluminum frames and a sprayed acoustical plaster on the walls to control noise.

dispensed with the old model of one long kennel in which dogs are placed in opposing runs divided by a single aisle. Instead, they devised a floor plan of 20 individual, indoor/outdoor rooms with laminated glass fronts. Translucent dividers were incorporated to limit the dogs' face-to-face contact and thereby cut down on visual stimulation that often leads to barking. The walls and ceilings were treated with a sprayed acoustical plaster that can stand up to being sprayed with extremely hot water and works to maximize sound absorption. Acoustical ceiling tiles were chosen for hallways, the training center, and other public spaces. The result: vastly reduced noise transmission from

CATEGORY	DECIBEL LEVEL	EXAMPLES	RECOMMENDATIONS
Dangerous	About 110 dBA and up	Firearms; fireworks and jet engines at close range; loud concerts or music clubs	Always use ear protection
Harmful	About 100-110 dBA	Chainsaw; snowmobile; loud aerobics class	Protect ears when exposure exceeds 15 minutes
Potentially Harmful	About 85-100 dBA	Circular saw; loud string trimmer or power blower; motorcycle at high speed; loud wedding reception; loud mower; loud vacuum cleaner	Ear protection recommended, especially for regular, lengthy exposure
Relatively Safe	About 85 dBA or less	City traffic noise; hair dryer; electric string trimmer or mower; quiet vacuum cleaner; noisy dishwasher; noisy air conditioner	Ear protection not needed

To deter long-term hearing loss, *Consumer Reports* developed the above recommendations based on the findings of the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders.

the rooms, and vastly reduced reverberation within them.

When the Animal Rescue League of Iowa was ready to replace its 13,000-square-foot shelter, it turned to Animal Arts, an architectural firm in Boulder, Colo., that designs shelters and veterinary hospitals. “We knew noise control is extremely important to us, because we basically didn’t have any in the old building,” says Tom Colvin, executive director of the Des Moines organization.

The goal was not only to introduce noise-control measures into the shelter’s design, but also to create an environment conducive to calm canines. The new, 43,000-square-foot facility, completed in October 2008, features Plexiglass-front runs arranged so that dogs aren’t always staring at each other, and multiple exits for staff and volunteers to take dogs out for walks, rather than one long aisle leading to a single door. Shelter dogs tend to get excited and bark at the sight of other dogs walking past their runs; taking a shorter route to a closer exit cuts down on the opportunity for these interactions.

Windows and skylights let in direct sunlight, and a powerful HVAC system circulates 100 percent fresh air throughout the shelter, including 15 air exchanges per hour in the adoption area—two factors that Colvin believes keep the animals happy and comfortable.

“Obviously, if we can keep the dogs quiet to begin with, if we can keep them not stressed, they’re going to be less likely to bark in the first place,” he says.

The Sound of Music

Although addressing noise issues in design is crucial, shelters don’t have to finance and build a new facility to improve noise control in their kennels. A less-costly renovation project can still achieve great results. Architects face constraints when working with a shelter that’s 30 or 40 years old, but the same principles of reducing noise transmission and reverberation apply to retrofitting as they do to new construction.

When Animal Arts remodeled the housing in the kennel area of the SPCA Serving Erie County in Tonawanda, N.Y., it did so with acoustics in mind. The organization, located in an older facility, wanted to improve its kennels, where the sound of barking



MICHELLE RILEY/THE HSUS

Staff at Loudoun County Animal Care and Control use clicker training to shape the behavior of shelter dogs, who quickly learn to stay calm and quiet if they want to get a treat. Two “pupils” show they understand how the game works, with Jenny Swiggart, left, advanced animal care and behavior coordinator, and staff member April Primus.



MICHELLE RILEY/THE HSUS

Dogs at Loudoun County Animal Care and Control are given many physical and mental outlets to keep them busy, so they don’t get bored and start barking. Using a clicker, Jenny Swiggart trains this newly arrived dog to maneuver the shelter’s agility course.

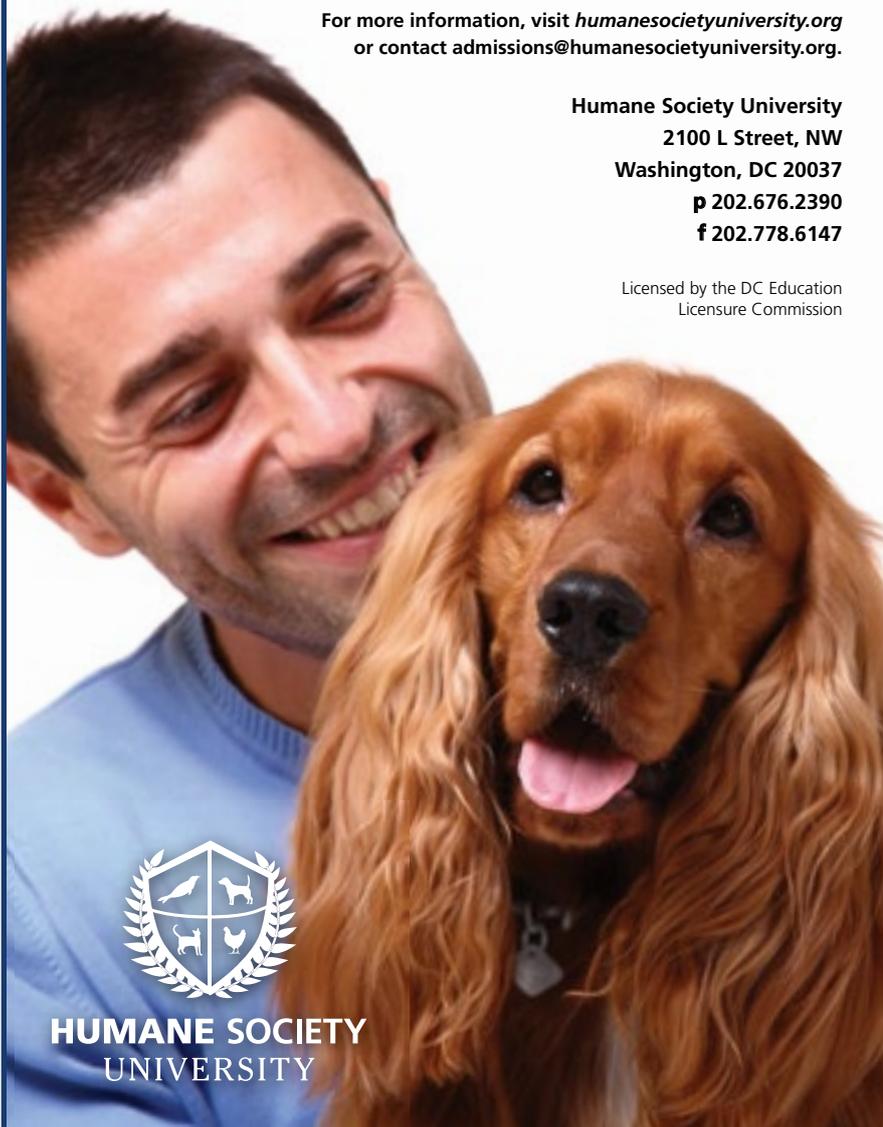
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was overwhelming. Architects replaced the traditional runs with individual “real life” rooms for each dog. Finishes were improved with acoustic products. Natural light was let into the space, increasing the psychological comfort of the dogs. “By the end of the renovation, this was actually the quietest place in the shelter,” says Heather Lewis, an architect with Animal Arts.

If that type of project proves too costly for a shelter’s budget, there are still plenty of smaller but effective fixes. Architects and contractors can look at a variety of noise-absorptive products that inhibit reverberation (sound waves bouncing off of surfaces). A few examples would be acoustic ceiling tiles, special plaster finishes, rubber floor covering, and sound baffles (panels or pads of acoustic material).

To reduce sound transmission (noise moving from one space to another), look for solutions in acoustic (thick or multiple-layer) glass, solid-core doors with seals or gaskets to stop noise from “leaking” through gaps, and concrete-block walls, which have the mass to block sound from escaping a space.

Masking the noise in a kennel with background music is a quick, easy, and inexpensive way to improve the environment and reduce stress. Sound isn’t additive, so when a shelter plays classical music, it doesn’t make things louder. “It’s just filling in different frequencies, and so it has a tendency to mask the other noises,” Lewis says. “That’s actually a big reason why they have fountains in big hotel lobbies, so you don’t hear the clattering of suitcases and that sort of thing.”

The key to a renovation project, Learned notes, is to find a fix that works, is cost-effective, is least disruptive to shelter operations, and doesn’t require another major building component—such as the HVAC system or the roof—to be taken down and rebuilt.

Stop that Barking

Some basic improvements to canine happiness can also help you quiet a kennel without hiring an architect, tearing down walls, or raising a cloud of dust.

Jenny Swiggart, advanced animal care and training coordinator at Loudoun County Animal Care and Control in Waterford, Va., uses a combination of enrichment and clicker

Resources

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has strict regulations regarding acceptable decibel levels (particularly on a continual or routine basis) to protect employees. Its guidelines state that when employees are exposed to 85 decibels or higher on an eight-hour average, ear protection must be available and a general hearing conservation program instituted. For more information, visit osha.gov.

training to keep a lid on the noise at her shelter. Staff and volunteers keep dogs active with canine play groups, “bobbing for treats” in a kiddie pool, and sessions of chasing after soap bubbles.

“Everything we do here is geared toward getting the animals to think and interact with their environment, so we’ll do a lot of scent work,” Swiggart says. That means hiding scents like cinnamon or vanilla in pots, pans, or scent sticks—PVC pipes with holes in them, capped at both ends. “And then once they find it, they will roll it around and play with it, because it’s got this really interesting smell inside of it.”

The dogs get plenty of exercise to burn off energy, going with volunteers for frequent walks on a nearby bike path or even off-site for longer jaunts. The idea is to get them nice and tired, and give them opportunities to engage their minds. That’s where the clicker training comes in. Staff use a clicker noisemaker, along with treats, to look for, shape, and reward appropriate behavior. This technique is used with great success to quickly teach dogs how to stay quiet in their kennels. This kind of training is easy to teach, and easy to use. It works, too, keeping the kennel quiet—most of the time.

“You have a nice, quiet environment, and then you get a foxhound down there, and the foxhound’s like ‘Wooo wooo’ and super excited, and then you have to kind of start over,” Swiggart says. But, she says, “It actually doesn’t take a long time at all. That’s the beauty of clicker training. ... [Dogs] want to know, ‘What can I do to make that silly person give me a click and a goodie?’”

Stephanie Collingsworth, a certified professional dog trainer, directs behavior assessment and training at Multnomah County Animal Services in Portland, Ore. She uses a combination of strategies to reduce noise. The kennel there has 25 inside/outside runs on each side of an aisle, so the dogs are face-to-face all day. Staff will move dogs who are obviously inciting each other, or stagger them as space allows, but mostly they rely upon enrichment techniques, treating barking as a symptom of stress or boredom.

Dogs are given food-stuffed Kongs about 10 minutes before the shelter opens, to minimize their initial excitement when visitors arrive. Volunteers work with the dogs throughout the day, using food buckets on the front of their runs. If there’s a problem barker, they treat the barking as a symptom of the dog’s stress level, and offer him down time in a crate in an office or supervised on a dog bed. They also might offer more stuffed Kongs during the day, or extra potty walks.

Volunteers are encouraged to take the shortest route out of the kennel when walking the dogs. “In a building where you *have* to walk past other dogs, I would have someone throw high-value treats a few steps *behind* the dog being walked,” Collingsworth says. “If this happens over and over again, you will classically condition the dogs in their kennels that the appearance of a dog in the aisle signals a treat coming.”

When it’s possible, the staff puts dogs together for playtime, which has dramatically reduced barking; the dogs in their runs are either exhausted from playing, or, since they already know the dog in the aisle, they seem to decide he’s not worth barking at. Invariably, there’s a dog who’s not satisfied with any of these measures, and then the staff looks for a foster home, or transfer.

“But overall, the enrichment program has done a ton to reduce barking. On an average day, you can stand inside the dog kennels and talk in a normal voice to an adopter,” Collingsworth says. “It’s not perfect. God knows, you’ll come in on a day when it’s all fallen to pieces, and everybody’s barking, or we’ve just got a really jacked-up population of dogs. It happens where you’ve got a week where it’s just, ‘Gosh, these dogs are really hard to keep satisfied.’ So it’s not perfect, but when it works, boy, it works really, really well.” **AS**

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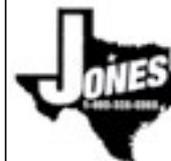
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Gold Standards—and Bare Minimums

Shelter veterinarians promote a road map to ensuring the “five freedoms” in animal shelters



BOTH IMAGES: MICHELLE RILEY/THE HSUS

The idea of developing uniform standards of care for animal shelters has been discussed in many circles for years. In 2008, the Association of Shelter Veterinarians (ASV) undertook this as a serious project, with the goal of creating a document that would help all shelters work at an improved level for the health and welfare of all the creatures in their care.

Three years and thousands of work-hours later, the group has released its guidelines.

In this e-mail interview, members of the task force that developed the guidelines—including doctors Kate Hurley, Brenda Griffin, Miranda Spindel, Mary Blinn, Sandra Newbury, and Jeanette O’Quin—address *Animal Sheltering’s* questions about the process, the standards, and their reasons for taking on the project.

ASM: Why did the ASV think that developing these standards was necessary? Were you trying to fill a particular gap?

ASV: We recognize that animal sheltering has evolved dramatically over the past three or four decades, and knowledge of animal care in the shelter setting has also grown by leaps and bounds. Today’s sheltering organizations are diverse, ranging from large, well-funded “brick and mortar” facilities to small, loosely organized grassroots groups or individuals. For some animals, shelter stays are brief, whereas others receive extended, even lifetime, care. For years, we’ve been aware of the profound stress that cats and dogs entering shelters face, as well as the significant risk of infectious disease. But now we have a growing body of scientific evidence that supports these observations and provides us with better tools than ever to protect the physical and behavioral health of sheltered animals. Despite these things, the care of animals in shelters has remained

largely unstandardized and unregulated. In addition, many sheltering facilities were not designed to provide the conditions that we now know are necessary for animal health and well-being. So, yes—we believe a need for animal care guidelines, specifically for shelters, does exist in order to identify best and unacceptable practices as well as minimum standards of care—whether in a large organization, a small home-based effort, or something in between.

Had you observed particular conditions or issues at shelters that played into your work on this project?

Part of the impetus for this project was an increasing number of high-profile incidents where shelter conditions led to severe animal suffering and unnecessary death. This disturbing trend was highlighted by a recent report from Dr. Randall Lockwood (the ASPCA’s senior vice president of forensic sciences and anti-cruelty projects), that around 25 percent of the 6,000 or so hoarding cases reported annually in the U.S. involved animal shelters or rescue operations, up from only around 5 percent 20 years ago. We hope the shelter standards will be a strong statement that inhumane conditions have no place in sheltering. However, the need for the standards goes well beyond this. Not only should animals in shelters be protected from suffering and neglect, there are also many other important nuances critical for maintaining health and well-being. For instance, now that we know how important vaccination on intake is to maintain animal health, we saw a need to provide support for shelter managers who want to provide this level of care but face barriers—financial or logistical—to implementation. This is just one example of hundreds that are included in the standards.

What areas of shelter operations will the standards address?

All areas of sheltering that affect animal health and well-being or public health,



including management and record keeping, facility design and environment, population management, sanitation, medical health and physical well-being, behavioral health and mental well-being, group housing, animal handling, euthanasia, spay/neuter, animal transport, and public health.

Are the standards designed to be “the gold standard”—the ideal, best-possible operating procedures for all shelters? Or are they more of a “bare minimum” list, letting shelters know that you consider these to be the basic standards that anyone should be able to achieve?

All of the above! We have identified those practices that are absolutely “bare minimums” as well as some that are “gold standard.” Task force members strongly believe that these guidelines represent practical recommendations that are attainable by the vast majority of shelters and that, when implemented, protect the health and welfare of sheltered animals.

Can you tell us a bit about your process in developing these standards? Were they based on studies, on shelter visits and observations there, on discussions with shelter workers, or some combination of these?

The Association of Shelter Veterinarians convened a task force to create, publish, and present an extensively referenced, user-friendly document that establishes animal care and management practices that ensure the “five freedoms” for shelter animals. The 14 veterinarians who are members of the task force hail from a wide variety of backgrounds in shelter medicine—from veterinary colleges, national humane organizations, and municipal sheltering as well as the private sector. Collectively, this group represents several hundred years of experience working in

and with animal shelters! The guidelines are based on current principles of animal welfare, population medicine, immunology, infectious disease control, behavioral science, and public health, as determined by detailed reviews of the scientific literature and expert opinion.

How do you think these new standards will help shelters?

We hope that they will be a source of information and support as well as an impetus for continual improvement. They bring to light the fact that the needs of animals are fundamentally the same in all settings, from a large municipal shelter to a foster home. Our goals are to:

- provide shelters and communities with a tool for self-assessment and improvement;
- increase the consistency of the care delivered to animals in shelters;
- promote the highest standards of welfare, for existing facilities as well as new construction;
- provide sound reference material for regulatory purposes when communities look for guidance;
- provide a benchmark for when corrective action is needed;
- create a living document that will be responsive to developments in shelter medicine and animal care;
- establish what is required for a decent quality of life for populations of companion animals;
- dispel notions that high morbidity and mortality from disease and injury is the norm in shelters;
- connect expectations of sanitation, medical care, and mental/behavioral well-being to acceptable sheltering, and dispel any notion that these essentials are frivolous “extras” or cosmetic.

There are some rumors circulating that the standards are being developed to target limited-admission/no-kill shelters. Is there any truth to them? Is there any particular type of shelter you are hoping to reach?

The ASV guidelines are meant for the benefit of *all* sheltering organizations regardless of philosophy. While missions and resources may differ among shelters, the basic needs of companion animals remain the same.

This document focuses on identifying those needs, while recognizing that there can be many ways to meet them. All shelters want to optimize health and welfare for the animals in their care; we are providing a tool to help them accomplish this goal.

Do you have any concerns about these standards being used as means to attack shelters that don’t have the funding to meet them? For some government—and even some private—shelters, they could become an “unfunded mandate.”

Animal shelters are already being attacked, and have been for years. We think the ASV guidelines will actually support shelters as they respond to their critics and help critics recognize what reforms might be constructive. Until now there has been nothing to refer to, no consistent way to evaluate the merit of those accusations beyond what is defined in local animal cruelty statutes. The ASV guidelines can be used as a benchmark for comparison. For the majority of shelters, this means that they can respond to unfounded attacks by demonstrating that they meet or exceed the standards of care.

Remember also that this document is not regulatory. Shelters are not compelled to change anything. The unacceptable practices are noted as such because they are inhumane, and omission of those practices that are considered essential would result in animal suffering. The animal sheltering community cannot afford to ignore shelters that fail to provide humane care. The cost to the animals is too high, the damage to the integrity of animal sheltering is too great; and the end result could be the enactment of actual government mandates that regulate shelter management.

What do you hope to see as a result of this work?

It is our greatest hope that this document will serve shelter animals and those responsible for them by providing evidence-based, humane guidelines for their care. [ASV](#)

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 <p>Kosmo Small & Furry : Guinea Pig Added: 11/22/2010</p>	 <p>Abbie Cat : Domestic Short Hair-black and white Adopted: 11/30/2010</p>	 <p>Madame Luty Small & Furry : Guinea Pig Last Update: 11/30/2010</p>
 <p>Reilly Dog : Labrador Retriever Added: 11/22/2010</p>	 <p>Reilly Dog : Labrador Retriever Adopted: 11/30/2010</p>	 <p>Arthur Horse : Quarterhorse Last Update: 11/30/2010</p>
 <p>Percy Bird : Cockatoo Added: 11/22/2010</p>	 <p>Quincey Cat : Domestic Long Hair-gray Adopted: 11/30/2010</p>	 <p>Zeplin Cat : Domestic Short Hair-black and white Last Update: 11/30/2010</p>

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The Kindest Cut of All

Spaying and neutering young kittens and puppies

BY BRENDA GRIFFIN, D.V.M.



Veterinarians receive instruction on pediatric spay/neuter at a training lab. The National Spay/Neuter Training Center at the Humane Alliance in Asheville, N.C., offers year-round continuing education for veterinarians in pediatric spay/neuter.

Ask yourself: Which animals are most often adopted from your shelter? Then ask another question: Which animals are most likely to leave before they are spayed or neutered? For many shelters, unfortunately, the answer to both of these questions is the same: kittens and puppies.

According to a 2009 survey by PetSmart Charities, approximately one in three pet owners do not have their pets spayed or neutered

in a timely fashion following adoption. Of those surveyed, 13 percent of dog owners and 19 percent of cat owners had allowed their pet to have a litter—usually unintentionally. Furthermore, the survey revealed that substantial confusion exists among pet owners regarding the appropriate age for spay/neuter.

When animal adoption organizations require neutering but fail to perform the surgery prior to placement, they inevitably end

up adding to the number of litters born in their community. Even if a shelter has a 90 percent compliance rate for post-adoption spay/neuter, if one of their adopted dogs has a litter of 10 puppies, they're right back where they started.

For these reasons, shelters should always strive for neuter-before-adoption for all cats and dogs, including those often-overlooked kittens and puppies as young as 6 weeks of

[shelter medicine]

age. When shelters meet the goal of 100 percent neuter-before-adoption, they can take pride in knowing they are setting an example of responsible pet ownership and are ensuring that their agency's adopted pets will not reproduce!

What does "pediatric" spay/neuter mean?

"Pediatric," "early-age," or "prepubertal" sterilization refer to the neutering of patients between the ages of 6 and 16 weeks, a practice supported by the American Veterinary Medical Association, the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association, and the Association of Shelter Veterinarians. Some humane organizations began sterilizing young kittens and puppies prior to adoption as far back as 35 years ago.

Given that cats may experience estrus (heat) and become pregnant as early as 4-5 months old, delaying the spaying of kittens commonly results in a significant number of litters. And although dogs are not typically as precocious as cats, they often attain

puberty at approximately 6 months of age. Performing spaying and neutering prior to puberty—as well as prior to adoption—is the only way to ensure that your adopted pets do not reproduce!

Why do many vets still recommend spay/neuter at 6 months or older?

Most owned pet cats and dogs are neutered in private veterinary practices in the United States between 6 and 9 months of age, which is commonly recommended as the appropriate timing for surgery. But this recommendation is not based on a scientifically defined appropriate age for these procedures. It was probably originally chosen because anesthetic and surgical techniques were less advanced at the time, and surgical success was more likely in a larger patient. Despite considerable advances in anesthetic and surgical techniques and published data that illustrate shorter surgical times and lower complications rates for younger patients, these practices remain common.



KARLA BRESTLE

Brenda Griffin checks out a pup prior to surgery. All patients should undergo a veterinary exam before they're sterilized.



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Four male littermates are anesthetized and prepared for surgery. The techniques for performing pediatric spay/neuter are similar to those used in traditional-age patients; special equipment is not required.

Is it really safe to perform surgery on the babies?

Many veterinarians have expressed concerns regarding both the short- and long-term effects of sterilizing pediatric patients. In response to these concerns, numerous controlled prospective studies as well as large retrospective studies have been performed to establish the safety of these procedures.

Data from these studies suggest that early-age sterilization is not associated with serious health problems and is surgically and medically sound. In fact, it offers many advantages, including safe anesthetic and surgical techniques, shorter surgical and recovery times, and avoidance of the stresses and costs associated with spaying an animal while she's in heat, pregnant, or with pyometra (infection of the uterus).

One of the greatest concerns expressed by veterinary practitioners regarding early-age neutering involves its influence on urinary tract development and health of male kittens. Despite a lack of evidence on this front, some veterinarians have surmised that neutering young kittens may result in decreased urethral size, increasing the risk of feline urinary tract disease and urethral obstruction.

But numerous studies have evaluated urethral size, function, and health in neutered tomcats compared to sexually intact tomcats. Based on contrast retrograde urethrograms and urethral pressure profiles, neither urethral diameters nor dynamic urethral function differ significantly between sexually intact tomcats and neutered cats,

Resources

For other useful studies that may help you broach the issue of pediatric spay/neuter with vets in your community, check out the following references in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*:

- "The Association of Shelter Veterinarians veterinary medical care guidelines for spay-neuter programs," Vol. 233, No. 1, 2008; avmajournals.avma.org/doi/pdf/10.2460/javma.233.1.74
- "Determining the optimal age for gonadectomy of dogs and cats," Vol. 231, No. 11, 2007; avmajournals.avma.org/doi/pdf/10.2460/javma.231.11.1665

regardless of whether cats are neutered at 7 weeks versus 7 months of age or not at all. In addition, the incidence of urethral obstruction and lower urinary tract disease has not been shown to differ in regard to age of neuter.

Not just for litter prevention

Numerous health benefits are associated with spay/neuter, and its value as a preventive health care measure deserves emphasis.

When cats and dogs are spayed or neutered, diseases of the uterus, ovaries, and testes are eliminated, including cystic endometrial hyperplasia, pyometra, prostatitis, and various cancers of the gonads. Additionally, there is a significant reduction in the risk of mammary cancer in spayed versus sexually intact female cats and dogs—greater than 90 percent in those spayed before 6 months of age. Given that mammary tumors are among the most common types of tumors and are often highly malignant, this is a significant health benefit. In addition to the physical benefits, neutering also commonly results in the elimination of highly objectionable behavior, including scent marking, spraying, fighting and roaming. Remember: Timing of spay/neuter is key. It must occur before adoption and before puberty. This will ensure that cats and dogs do not reproduce, and will afford the individual animals with many health benefits.

Patient selection for pediatric spay/neuter

Shelter staff should select pediatric patients who appear in good health and body condition. Whenever possible, they should be vaccinated and dewormed prior to surgery. Routine infectious disease control protocols, including careful cleaning and disinfection, should be in place to minimize the risk of disease transmission.

As always, a veterinarian should examine each patient before surgery in order to make a final determination as to the patient's suitability as a surgical candidate on the given day. Many veterinarians prefer that their surgical patients weigh at least 2 pounds; however, some have great success with even smaller patients, so this parameter is at the veterinarian's discretion.

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Special considerations for pediatric spay/neuter patients

While the safety of administering anesthesia and performing surgery on young kittens and puppies has been well-established, surgical staff should be aware of the unique physiology and anesthetic requirements of the pediatric patient. Major concerns around the time of the surgery include hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) and hypothermia (low body temperature). These are easily avoided with some simple precautions.

Young animals possess minimal stores of hepatic glycogen, increasing their risk for hypoglycemia. To prevent hypoglycemia:

- Do not fast patients for more than two to four hours pre-operatively. The stomachs of pediatric patients empty rapidly, and a small meal a couple of hours before surgery is recommended and will not increase the risk of aspiration.
- Administer 50 percent dextrose or Karo syrup orally post-operatively if the patient is slow to recover (1 ml per kg of body weight).
- Feed a small meal once patients are standing or within 30 minutes to one hour after the operation.

Kittens and puppies have a large surface-area-to-volume ratio, and possess immature thermoregulatory systems and lesser fat stores than older patients, predisposing them to hypothermia. To prevent hypothermia:

- Provide bedding and sources of conductive heat and/or convective air warming.
- Use warm prep solutions and avoid the use of isopropyl alcohol in surgical preparation, since it has a cooling effect upon evaporation.
- Avoid excessive wetting and clipping of the hair coat and large surgical incisions.
- Minimize surgical and anesthetic time.
- If fluids are administered, be sure to warm them prior to use. If subcutaneous fluids are given, they should be administered in recovery.
- Monitor body temperature as needed.
- Once mobile, allow litters to recover together.

Be sure to love on the babies

Pay careful attention to minimizing stress in pediatric patients. Baby animals experience sensitive periods in their development, and fear imprinting can occur when events be-



ELEVENTH EARL OF MARY/
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Kittens and puppies are often a shelter's "Mostly Likely to Succeed" on the adoption front, but they are also often the animals most likely to go home without first being spayed or neutered.

come severely stressful. The good news is that most kittens and puppies respond very positively to human comfort and bounce back quickly when handled gently and soothingly. In order to prevent undue fear and anxiety:

- House littermates together before surgery and as soon as they are able to stand in recovery to prevent separation stress.
- Handle all patients gently and lovingly, and soothe them if they become frightened.
- Consider use of premedications, especially for patients who are very nervous or uncomfortable.

Anesthesia and monitoring

Given that metabolic development is largely complete by 6 weeks of age, the same anesthetic protocols used in adults can be safely administered to pediatric patients. Special equipment is not required—however, non-rebreathing systems should be used for gas anesthesia. Balanced anesthetic protocols are essential and must include adequate analgesia (pain relief) for all patients.

Historically, anticholinergic (heart rate-increasing) drugs such as atropine or glycopyrrolate have been recommended for routine use in pediatric patients, since heart rate was previously believed to be directly related to cardiac output in these patients. However, clinical studies and experience have not supported this recommendation. In addition, an improved understanding of the potential adverse effects of these drugs makes their routine use undesirable and no longer recommended.

Because of their low body weight, pediatric patients are particularly susceptible to overdos-

ing of anesthetic agents. This can be effectively prevented by obtaining accurate body weight for calculation of drug dosages and diluting stock concentrations of drugs as necessary to improve accuracy of dosing. Predetermined volume-by-weight charts can be used to simplify preparation of appropriate dosages. For

specific information on anesthetic protocols, see the online resources of the Veterinary Task Force to Advance Spay Neuter hosted by the Association of Shelter Veterinarians at shelter-vet.org/members/vtfasn/.

Regardless of the anesthetic used, patients should be continuously monitored by trained,

hands-on observers, and standard emergency readiness protocols should always be in place. As a rule of thumb, pediatric patients should maintain a heart rate of approximately 90 beats per minute and a respiratory rate of nine breaths per minute. These numbers are not absolute, and the patient should be monitored

Convincing Vets to Support Pediatric Spay/Neuter

People often tell me, “My organization wants to spay and neuter puppies and kittens before adoption, but we cannot find a vet who will do it.” Indeed, many veterinarians are reluctant to spay and neuter young kittens and puppies. In fact, it is quite common for these procedures not to even be taught in veterinary school. And, in some cases, veterinarians may have learned that surgical and anesthetic risks are greater in these immature patients compared to older ones. To the contrary: We now know that hundreds of thousands of young puppies and kittens have safely undergone these procedures. And, in comparison to older animals, both surgical and recovery times are much more rapid for pediatric patients!

But how do you convince reluctant veterinarians to perform these procedures? How can you walk the line of respecting their knowledge and experience, while meeting your goals of ensuring neuter before adoption for the animals in your care?

The good news is that to a large degree, the puppies and kittens will do it for you! All you have to do is convince one vet to perform spay/neuter on just a few of these young patients, and your doctor will quickly discover how easy and rewarding it is!

Here are some tips for approaching your veterinarian about pediatric spay/neuter:

- Be respectful of their time and their opinion: Contact each veterinarian individually. Make an appointment to see them; do not drop by.

- Explain the situation: You adopt many kittens and puppies, and ensuring they are spayed and neutered in a timely fashion is a high priority. Despite the best intentions of many adopters, life gets in the way, and they end up with a litter. Remove sentiment and stick to the facts. Tell them about your intake, adoption, and euthanasia rates. Be sure to tell them how many kittens and puppies leave the shelter without being spayed and neutered, and the difficulties of follow-up and ensuring compliance once they have gone home with adopters.

- Before your scheduled meeting, plan exactly what you will ask of them. Convince them to perform surgery on one litter. If they are not comfortable with surgery on 8-week-old puppies, start with puppies who are a bit older. When they have confidence doing 16-week-old puppies, bring them 12-week-old puppies. When they have no problem with 12-week-old kittens, bring them kittens who are 9 weeks old. Most veterinarians are already used to working on patients of all different sizes, and they will very quickly realize how well their patients do with these procedures at a very young age!

- Leave them some information—studies supporting pediatric spay/neuter, information about your organization’s intake and euthanasia rates. If possible, leave a copy of *Veterinary Seminars in Spay-Neuter Surgery: Pediatrics and/*

or other studies on the issue (See resource box, p. 49.)

- Consider funding a trip for them to the Humane Alliance training center! In my experience, most veterinarians who are not willing to perform pediatric spay/neuter have simply never done it before. Once they learn the procedures, they embrace them and are willing to do them on an ongoing basis.
- Offer incentives for veterinarians to participate. For example, when the pet is adopted, tell the new owner who spayed their new dog. Put a plaque in the veterinarian’s waiting room—their clients will be pleased to know their veterinarian is helping out. Never forget to thank them for their time and expertise! Sometimes if you can convince just one veterinarian in your community to assist with pediatric spay/neuter, that veterinarian may help to convince others; the argument will be better-received from a colleague. Perhaps that veterinarian could approach the president of the local veterinary association about arranging a continuing education session on pediatric spay/neuter. Most associations have such meetings several times each year, and this would be a great topic—a way to open some doors. Accept that you will probably never convince 100 percent of the veterinarians in any community to perform pediatric spay/neuter. That’s OK. Stay positive and remember: The key to success is honest and sincere communication.

[shelter medicine]

for trends in vital parameters. If bradycardia (low heart rate) occurs, gas anesthesia should be turned down, and body temperature should be measured to assess the patient for hypothermia. If necessary, appropriate reversal agents, anticholinergic drugs, or warm IV fluids may be administered. When the recommended protocols are followed and surgical times are kept short, bradycardia is rare.

Surgical techniques

Many of the surgical techniques used to sterilize adult cats and dogs can also be used for pediatric patients. As their tissue is elastic and devoid of excessive fat, the procedures are often easier and require less time to complete. The surgeon should be cautious to make the incision of a length appropriate for the size of the patient so as to reduce the risk of hypothermia. In pediatric patients, most surgeons prefer to center the abdominal incision midway between the umbilicus and pubis, as this affords the best exposure of the ovaries and uterine body. Upon entering the abdominal cavity, a moderate amount of clear peritoneal fluid is often encountered; this is normal. Tissues

are fragile and should be handled gently to minimize trauma and reduce hemorrhaging. Pediatric patients have poor ability to compensate for blood loss, predisposing them to anemia; however, achieving hemostasis (stopping hemorrhage) is simplified due to the lack of fat and ease of visibility of the pediatric tissues.

In conclusion, the American Veterinary Medical Association and the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association encourage early-age sterilization and neuter before adoption. The Association of Shelter Veterinarians' Veterinary Task Force to Advance Spay-Neuter recommends that all cats and dogs be neutered prior to adoption, including those as young as 6 weeks old. The task force recommends that privately owned pets be neutered following completion of their kitten and puppy vaccines at 4-5 months of age. By performing timely spay/neuter procedures, animal shelters and veterinarians can enhance the welfare of their patients and reduce the number of litters born in their communities. Although it may seem intimidating at first to operate on a pediatric patient, it truly is much easier to operate on a 2-pound kitten or puppy than it is on a mature animal!

Training resources for pediatric spay/neuter

A new instructional video, *Veterinary Seminars in Spay-Neuter Surgery: Pediatrics*, is now available for veterinarians. This video is a high-quality veterinary education tool developed in collaboration with board-certified veterinary surgeons. It details the procedures for spaying and neutering pediatric patients. The video can be downloaded at no charge from Humane Alliance at humanealliance.org/index.php/vetextern-training/instructional-video-series. The DVD may also be purchased online.

In addition to the video, Humane Alliance also offers hands-on training opportunities for veterinarians at their state-of-the-art training center in Asheville, N.C. The North Carolina State Board of Veterinary Medicine grants continuing education credits to veterinarians for time spent at the center. The Veterinary Task Force to Advance Spay Neuter is also increasingly offering hands-on training in pediatric spay/neuter at major veterinary conferences. 



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Avoiding the Bait and Switch

Make sure your promises to prospective volunteers match reality

BY HILARY ANNE HAGER



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Don't promise a sunny volunteer experience if your agency can't deliver it.

Culture can be communitywide or nationwide, and within the world of animal shelters, individual organizations have their own cultures, their own atmospheres, ways of doing things, and sets of shared values and goals. Organizational culture is often heavily influenced by the organizational mission, but equally influenced by the people who work there.

It's common practice for volunteer managers to clarify the mission, vision, and values of their organization as they help prospective volunteers decide whether to become a part of it. Less emphasis is placed on the common culture of the people already working in the organization—and the two

cultures of employees and volunteers are often worlds apart.

Shelters are organized to help animals, but it's the human animal that can often have the greatest effect on the working environment. Each organization has a rich undercurrent of individual personalities, experiences, and interpersonal skills and styles that can affect a volunteer's experience. Every animal organization engaging volunteers should aim to create a vision for successfully incorporating them into the organization's work. Will volunteers be seen as vitally important partners who add value? Will the organization commit to developing a professional volunteer program—one managed by dedicated staff?

Will the organization's appreciation of volunteers be incorporated into communication at every level?

These are all essential steps in building an effective volunteer program. The organization's leaders must set the tone and take the lead in making this happen, ensuring that it filters to every level of staff in order to make it a reality.

Sometimes there's a disconnect between the organizational picture the volunteer coordinator paints when she recruits and trains volunteers and the experience that volunteers have in their work. Program managers might speak about the importance of volunteers, and how essential they are in carrying out the

[volunteer management]

organization's mission, but if the rest of the staff who work with and oversee volunteers don't embody and express those values, or show that they're committed to building relationships with them, the positive words of the volunteer manager may come across as a bunch of hot air.

For example, if the relationship between staff and volunteers is marked by conflict, tension, or even animosity toward volunteers, the organization will have difficulty retaining them. The goal is to create a more healthy environment in the long term, but if new volunteers are likely to experience tension, organizations should select those people who can handle it. It's critical to be honest with ourselves about the environment into which we're inviting volunteers.

In addition, many people working with animals think of themselves as "animal people" rather than "people people," and might not have had any training or experience overseeing volunteers. People who haven't been trained in supervision and aren't able to provide clear feedback and communication are not the best fit for managing volunteers, but sometimes those staff members are the only option. To create an organizational culture promoting volunteer involvement, work with those staff who perhaps don't have a natural affinity for interacting directly with people, in order to give them the skills they need to succeed. Leaders should be clear that staff is expected to work with volunteers, whether it comes naturally or not.

Gimme Some Truth

In an organization where people pay lip service to the value of volunteers but the culture itself doesn't reflect those values, volunteer coordinators often won't be able to make good on their promises that volunteers will be appreciated and treated as partners. Coordinators don't directly supervise the staff, and can't ensure that staff meet their expectations for how volunteers are treated. Volunteer program managers frequently get put in the position of lobbying other managers and supervisors to ensure their staff treat volunteers appropriately.

Whether they work in a truly volunteer-positive environment or one that's still struggling to make the employee/volunteer gears mesh effectively, it's vital that volunteer co-

ordinators be honest with prospective volunteers about what to expect, and select volunteers who can thrive in the environment as it is, not the environment as the volunteer coordinator hopes it will be. No one wants to tell volunteers to expect to encounter unfriendly or impatient staff, but if that's likely, it seems only fair to prepare them.

I have found that truth is the best policy. Tell prospective volunteers that you're recruiting for the program you have, not the program you hope to have. Let people know that

If the relationship between staff and volunteers is marked by conflict, tension, or even animosity toward volunteers, the organization will have difficulty retaining them.

while staff may truly appreciate the contributions of volunteers, they're often too busy to stop and engage in small talk above a quick "thank you."

In my shelter, we find people who are well-trained up front and who are able to work with little or no direct supervision. Our staffing structure requires this—but not every individual wants to participate in that kind of program. If they need or want more interaction with and direction from staff than they're likely to get, I encourage them to look elsewhere. I want volunteers to be happy and to have long careers of service with my organization. But if it isn't a match, I want them to find another organization where they can be involved and love what they're doing.

I also feel it's my job as a volunteer manager to bring in volunteers who will, through their actions, remind the staff each and every day that the volunteer program is the best thing that ever happened to the shelter. If I bring in volunteers who are disruptive, who aren't able to follow directions, and who make work harder for staff, I am reinforcing the notion that volunteers are more trouble than they're worth. I

make sure volunteers are going to be able to perform at a high level. When they do, the staff is delighted, which makes them even more supportive of the program. I explain my strategy to volunteers and let them know we'll give them the tools they'll need to succeed.

Training should aim to allow volunteers to be as self-directed and self-supporting as possible, so they're not interrupting staff or making staff jobs harder.

There is never an excuse for staff to behave inappropriately toward volunteers. But volunteers are less likely to be offended or put off by brusque behavior if they understand the context of the staff's work, and why some employees are perhaps too busy completing other assigned tasks to stop and chat. Volunteer managers have to find ways to bridge the gap between staff and volunteers to foster understanding and appreciation.

Betsy McFarland, senior director of the Companion Animals department at The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), and the author of the book *Volunteer Management for Animal Care Organizations*, says in workshops she teaches she tries to address the "us versus them" tension that sometimes arises between staff and volunteers. Staff members often feel that volunteers don't appreciate the fact that employees can't simply go home after a difficult incident such as being urinated on or bitten by an animal, or yelled at by a patron. Volunteers, meanwhile, often think that the staff doesn't appreciate that they have full-time jobs elsewhere and are helping the shelter by choice.

McFarland says the challenge for volunteer directors is to facilitate a more understanding environment. There are a variety of ways to do this; in my old shelter, we created a video called "A Day in the Life" that showed (at high speed and with music) the average daily routine of a staffer, including cleaning, feeding, assessing behavior, receiving animals, and overseeing adoption visits. It was cute and fun, and helped give volunteers a better understanding of how involved and varied the staff's work is, and also the level of professionalism that is required. In my current shelter, all prospective volunteers spend one hour observing the front counter of the shelter, watching as animals are

brought in or adopted out, witnessing the range of conversations that take place over the counter or over the phone. This helps them to better understand the environment and the realities of working in a large, open-admission shelter.

Likewise, staff needs to be made aware of the elements of the volunteer program, so they can understand what volunteers are learning and what's expected of them. Staff should be required to attend volunteer trainings; in my experience, the trainings often include more explanation and sit-down time for volunteers than staff get as a part of their own orientation. In addition, if the training is well-designed, staff might be surprised at what all volunteers are expected to know, and might even learn something new!

To further create a friendly culture between staff and volunteers, McFarland recommends recognizing the work of both. Volunteer recognition ceremonies, for example, can be broadened to recognize a team effort between staff and volunteers, or volunteers and staff can recognize each

other to build a team atmosphere and break down barriers. Even if a collaborative and appreciative relationship with volunteers isn't the default mode for individual staff, or isn't yet a routine part of organizational culture, the volunteer manager can take the steps to create an environment where those relationships can grow, and the organizational leadership must make it clear that it's the expectation of each and every staff person moving forward.

Creating a Good Fit

Volunteer program managers should also give some thought to what attributes and characteristics help ensure people are well-suited to working in the organization. Communicate those traits to prospective volunteers so they can self-screen and decide if they are a good fit. The relationship between the volunteer and the organization must be mutually beneficial, and knowing what you're looking for will increase the odds you might get it. Too often, we don't articulate and specify what we want, then get upset or disappointed

when we don't get it. Taking a more thoughtful and deliberate approach will serve all parties more effectively.

In my organization, we have a document called "About Our Volunteers" that includes a clear outline of the qualities we're looking for and why they're important. Volunteers need to understand their commitment; be flexible; demonstrate the ability to follow directions and handle conflict effectively; be solution-oriented and receptive to feedback; use good judgment; be safe; and be prepared for some of the dirty (meaning difficult and sad, and also literally dirty!) work the shelter has to do.

We share this document with prospective volunteers at the orientation, and we invite them to assess their fit. Volunteer trainers also use these criteria to assess volunteers. Being this transparent and specific really helps get prospective volunteers thinking and gives us a concrete way to determine a potential volunteer's suitability as they go through the process of becoming a member of the team. It also provides a basis for giving guidance if



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we discover later that people aren't performing in the way we expect them to perform.

Each organization can take internal steps to create an environment that welcomes and appreciates volunteers. These include specifying supervision of volunteers as a part of staff job descriptions. If staff will be expected to work effectively and collaboratively with volunteers, questions about applicants' experience performing such tasks should be a part of the hiring process. Staff members' success in working with volunteers should be included in performance evaluations.

Organizations must also clearly identify their expectations for how staff should interact with volunteers. It's not enough to simply expect staff will know how to do it best; it has to be defined and shared with staff so they're clear on what's expected of them. At a minimum, staff should be asked to smile and greet volunteers pleasantly. They should acknowledge volunteers and be expected to greet many of them by name—one of the reasons name badges on volunteers can be so helpful, especially when there are large numbers of volunteers or rotating schedules. Each staff person should also be in the habit of saying goodbye to the volunteers when they're done with their shift, and to thank them for their service.

Staff should also be able and willing to provide feedback to volunteers as needed. Each organization will create its own system, of course, but unless the volunteer coordinator is on hand every minute to provide direct supervision to all volunteers, it's likely that other staff will be directly overseeing the work volunteers perform. It's also just as likely that there will be times when volunteers need guidance or an explanation about why a particular task needs to be done in a particular manner.

I assume that volunteers are there because they want to help, and that they want to help in a way that is actually helpful. Further, I assume that if they're ever doing something that isn't helpful, they want staff to let them know, rather than not being told and having the staff redo everything the volunteers have just done. I communicate those assumptions to volunteers during orientation. I explain that if they would rather not know when they're doing something wrong, my organization might not be a good fit for them.

No matter how well-trained volunteers are, it's possible, if not likely, that they will at some

time make a mistake. The staff directly overseeing the volunteers' work should be expected to provide support as needed in the moment, whether it's to explain what needs to be done and how it should be completed, or to request that a volunteer not do something or do something differently. It might be something as innocuous as putting laundry away in the wrong location, or it could be something more serious, such as giving incorrect information about a particular animal or the adoption process. Staff must be able and willing to let the volunteer know when they're doing something incorrectly, and give them the tools to do it right.

It's most effective for staff to explain the "why" of the request ("The laundry needs to go in that room because ..." or "Actually, the information about that cat is here ..." or "Please refer people to the front counter to answer those questions because..."), rather than just stating the preferred action. The explanations are more likely to stick with the volunteers. This is also where effective training comes into play, to minimize the amount of time staff has to spend correcting and re-directing volunteers. It's also important that volunteers be willing to find out that they're wrong; if they're not receptive to feedback and take it poorly when staff requests they do something differently, it's clear they're not a good fit for a program where things need to be done a particular way.

Those corrective conversations can be challenging, even for well-seasoned supervisors. They can be even more challenging for line staff who have never been trained on the subject. Shelters should offer training on effective feedback, including role-playing and providing specific strategies to help staff provide advice graciously and effectively. Staff may not come to the organization with this set of skills, but there's no reason they can't acquire them. Staff should also have a means of sharing specific concerns about volunteers with their manager or the volunteer program manager. Staff should never feel as though incompetent volunteers are being inflicted upon them, and volunteers who make their work harder should not be allowed to continue in the program. If those situations arise, shelters need to take a hard look at the program; if volunteers who are not a good fit are disruptive to the program and are affecting the staff's ability to work, changes to the volunteer screening pro-

Resources

For additional information on creating a welcoming environment for volunteers, check out animalsheltering.org/volunteermanagement, where you'll find some of *Animal Sheltering's* previous Volunteer Management columns, including "Building a Successful Volunteer Program," "Take Time for Training," and "Leading Change at Your Shelter."

To see the document that Everett Animal Services in Washington state uses to help prospective volunteers gauge their fit with the program, go to animalsheltering.org/aboutourvolunteers.

cess need to occur to ensure the organization is bringing in the right volunteers.

It's impossible to overemphasize the importance of bringing in the right volunteers. Some environments, however, are so fraught with conflict and so emotionally charged that it will be challenging to find people who can not only tolerate being there, but also thrive. Volunteering in animal care environments is simply not the same as volunteering in any other type of organization—whether because the staff feels the pressure of being understaffed or under-resourced, is suffering from burnout or compassion fatigue, or simply because of the overwhelming number of animals and people in need. Sometimes, even other volunteers can present a challenge to new volunteers entering an environment; it's not just staff who can seem unwelcoming or unappreciative. Volunteer managers have to keep an eye on and attempt to manage all facets of the program, and smooth as many of the obstacles as possible, but they can't do it alone.

Effective leadership needs to pursue changes on an organizational level in order to create an environment that is welcoming and conducive to highly effective volunteer involvement. Culture and organizational transformation takes time. In the meantime, as the organization moves toward its goals, volunteers should be met with frank conversations to prepare them for the multiple situations they will encounter. AS



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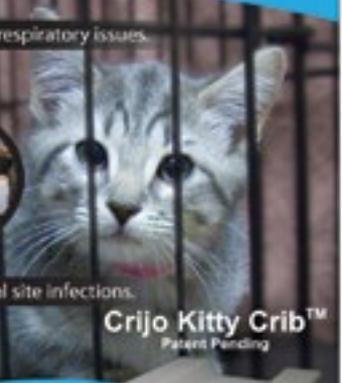
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I Feel Kitty, Oh So Kitty

A new Web-based system drives users to shelter websites—to play with cats in real time

BY CARRIE ALLAN

It's totally obvious: Even with Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and the gazillion other niche-interest websites out there (*IHateCilantro.com*, anyone?), the Internet had barely tapped into its true procrastination potential.

Until now.

Now, thanks to an innovative tool called the iPet Companion, you—and cat-loving Web denizens everywhere—can spend hours playing with live cats, using only a few buttons on your keyboard. And since it's for a good cause—giving shelter kitties something to do, and perhaps driving up cat adoption rates into the bargain—you don't even have to feel bad about it (though if you tell your employer we said that, we will deny it).

Developed by Apriori, a robotics company in Boise, Idaho, the system wasn't initially conceived as a long-distance cat toy, says Scott Harris, the company's owner. Harris worked in the photovoltaic and semiconductor business for years, and says situations regularly crop up where something goes wrong in a control room somewhere, and engineers need to hit a "reset" button to get things restarted. Sometimes that means "driving 45 minutes at 2 A.M.," and in cases where the control room was thousands of miles away or in another country, it might involve two days of travel. Harris and his team envisioned a system that would enable the user to see the button and use robotic controls to push it, live, over the Web, potentially saving huge amounts of time and trouble for those managing distant systems.

But as they were putting the system together, Apriori staff stumbled upon the Cat Factor: "One of my guys had a cat, and we were doing testing at his house, and he says, 'You know, I'm having so much fun—but I'm not getting a lot of work done because I'm just watching my cat through the camera and messing with him,'" says Harris.

Out of the mouths of bored tech guys ...



Early prototypes of the robotic toys that are activated by the iPet Companion were shredded in no time by feisty kittens. The developers subsequently devised sturdier playthings for the active furballs.

After kicking around the idea for a while, Harris cold-called Jeff Rosenthal, executive director at the Idaho Humane Society, and the two educated each other about their respective work. Soon Apriori was at the shelter, adding robotic cat toys to its colony cat room. Now, Web surfers can play along by visiting the humane society's site, then clicking on a virtual control panel that allows them to activate the toys and watch the cats respond.

"I thought the right sort of pet for this room was going to be kittens, because kittens are going to give us more play," says Rosenthal. "The other reason ... was that this was really our first foray into colony-type housing, and kittens are so much more amenable to colony housing, I think, because they socialize so quickly versus adult cats."

Rosenthal says that the folks from Apriori learned fast that kittens are "a heck of a lot more destructive than they'd realized." Many of the toys they started with were destroyed quickly, and they've since successfully beefed up the ruggedness of the components. Harris says Apriori is working with a pet toy

maker to develop toys to use in the future build-outs.

Now, since the camera is a little warmer than the rest of the room, some of the kittens like to sleep on it. "Sometimes at night I'll look over and there'll be a kitten hanging over the camera asleep," says Rosenthal.

The iPet has been great for the Idaho shelter, Rosenthal says. "For an open-admission shelter that has an incredible success rate here in Boise, but still has old perceptions persisting among a lot of the community, it's part of that paradigm change—hey, the humane society is not a sad place, it's a fun place," he notes. Hundreds of people have logged on to play with the cats—the shelter even heard from a lady in an assisted-living facility who can't have cats of her own but loves playing with them over the Internet.

"My boss saw it and said, 'Idaho beat us to the world's coolest toy,'" laughs Barbara Baugnon, marketing communications director at the Oregon Humane Society in Portland. Apriori had decided it would do two installs pro bono, and Baugnon launched a successful campaign to make Oregon the second.

"I told him people in Portland would be very interested in this toy," she says. "I just knew they would because we're animal lovers, and we love technology." She was right, too: "I think last count we had over 30 TV stories on it, and it was on the front page of the metro section of the *Oregonian*."

Shelters that want to get in on the fun now will likely find the \$8,200 installation costs prohibitive. However, a wealthy donor looking for a worthy project to fund might be impressed by the results the iPet Companion has gotten in Portland. Since the system was installed, Baugnon says, sponsored donations to Oregon Humane were up by 37 percent, adoption of kittens up by 14 percent, and website traffic up by 52 percent.

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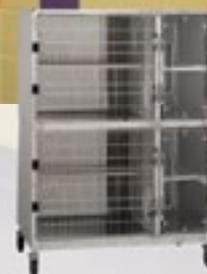


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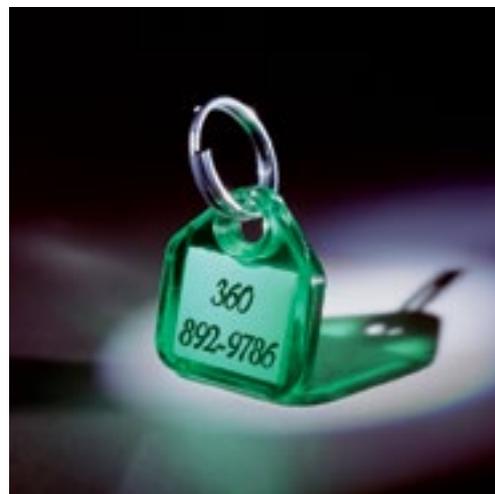
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