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March/April 2011

The Magazine for Animal Care Professionals and Volunteers

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The Magazine for Animal Care Professionals and Volunteers

ALSO:
Many shelters have policies that stipulate adopters may not give animals to a new owner without the shelter's permission. But are these policies enforceable? And if an adopter violates one, what should you do? Our legal columnist tackles the issue.
Humane Law Forum, p. 49



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Culture Clash— or a Class in Culture?

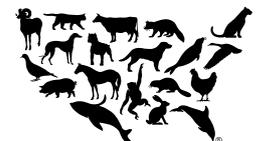
Lorraine Chittock and her two dogs have traveled through Africa and Latin America, witnessing the complex (and, to many Westerners, confusing) relationships that people in developing countries have with their pets. It takes a keen eye to see that what looks like indifference may not be—and that other cultures love their animals, too, but have different ways of showing it.



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Someone to Watch Over Me

As wounded soldiers return from Iraq and Afghanistan, military and veterans' hospitals around the country are increasingly using a variety of canine-assisted therapies to heal their scars. Thanks to the persistent, loving presence of dogs, many service members are able find a kind of peace—and some shelter dogs also find homes and companionship.



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5 Letterbox

6 Scoop

A pregnant animal control officer helps save 13 pets from an apartment building blaze; two North Carolina churches partner with animal advocates to provide veterinary care to a community; staff from the Humane Society of Missouri look back at their work sheltering hundreds of pit bulls from a huge dogfighting raid; an animal welfare group helps the homeless in Portland, Ore., care for their pets; and much more.

26 Coffee Break

What's the longest distance someone has traveled to adopt or reclaim an animal from your agency/organization? Have you sent pets long distances to meet their future guardians? Did a microchip lead to a long-distance reunion? Did someone spot their dream kitty on your website? In your space, you tell us about some incredible journeys.

42 The "101" Department

A basic intake exam should be done on every animal who comes into your shelter. Ten minutes per animal can prevent confusion, disease outbreaks, and even lawsuits. With a little practice, you can make this essential part of an animal's stay into an efficient routine.

45 Q & A

Veterinarian Sara Pizano faced daunting challenges when she took over as head of Miami-Dade Animal Services in 2005: no pain medications, no management of the shelter population, overcrowding, and a very high infectious disease and mortality rate. Within five years, she and her staff had turned it around, winning major awards from the Florida Animal Control Association. How did she do it?

49 Humane Law Forum

Ellen DeGeneres sparked a major brouhaha in 2007 when she gave away her adopted pup Iggy to her hairdresser. Despite a televised, tear-filled plea by the comedian, Iggy was taken back, returned to the rescue group, and adopted out again. Does a shelter have the right to reclaim an adopted animal if the adopter violates the adoption agreement by giving the animal away? It helps to know the basics of contract law.

53 Behavior Department

Some cats don't adjust well to shelters, stressed out by the unfamiliar sights, sounds, and smells. For these kitties, one cat behavior specialist advocates "behavioral CPR," using interactive play sessions to bring back cats who sit frozen in their cage or litter box, unresponsive to visitors.

60 Off Leash

Lunch breaks aren't just for humans at one Wisconsin shelter.

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The Small Print

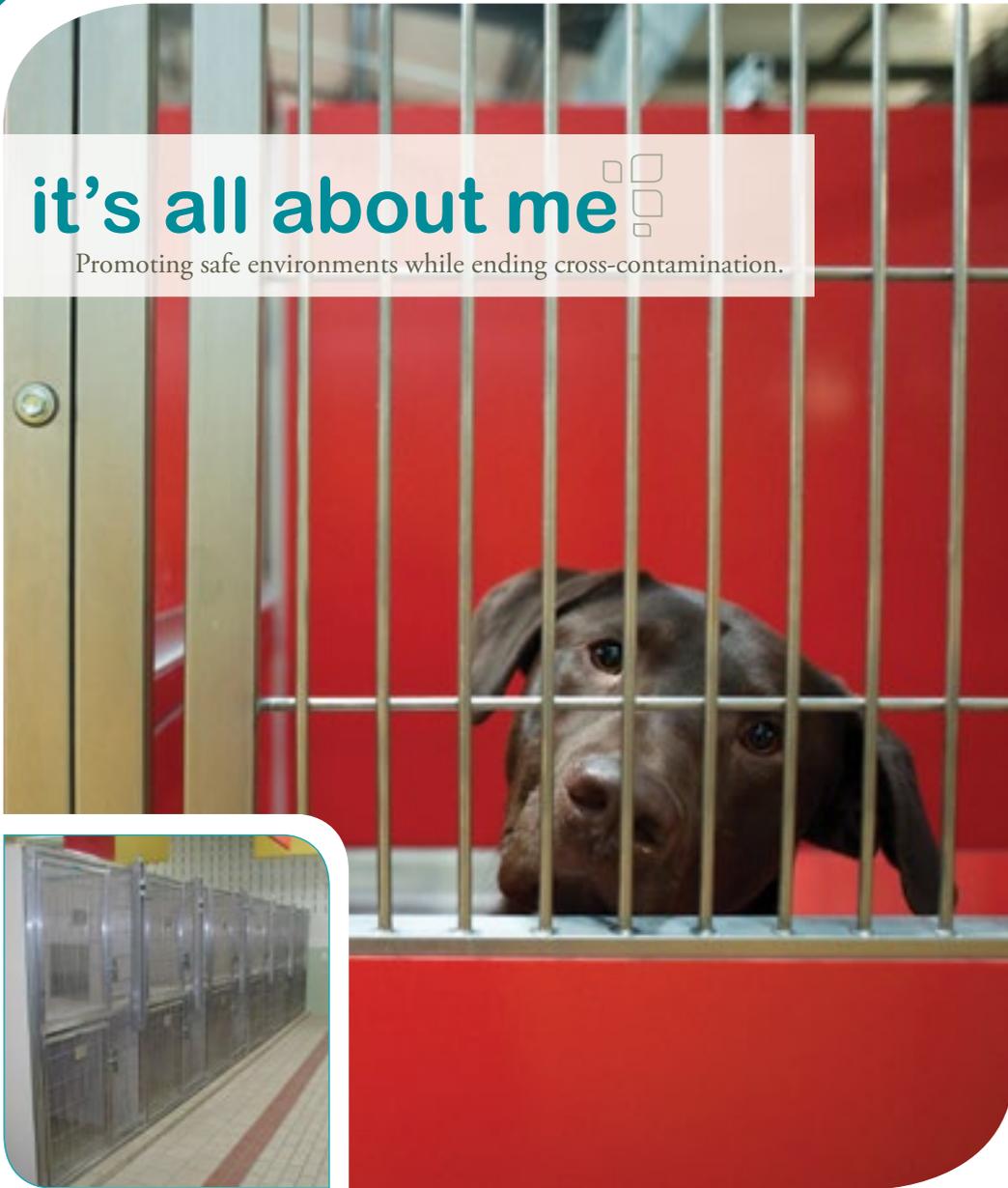
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— Eric Bellows
Owner, Pack Ethic Rescue
Sparkers, NY
February 2010

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References:

1. Data on file, Intervet/Schering-Plough Animal Health.
2. Deshpande NS, Irjei PE, Tubbs A, et al. Evaluation of the efficacy of a canine influenza virus (H3N8) vaccine in dogs following experimental challenge. *Vet Ther* 2009;10(3):103-112.

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For some people, companion animals are much more than companions. This issue's cover story ("Someone to Watch Over Me," p. 34) explores how veterans' hospitals around the country are using the unconditional love provided by dogs to help heal the psychic wounds of soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. And the benefits are mutual, as military veterans help rambunctious shelter dogs develop the manners that will make them more adoptable.

Among our usual mix of stories, you'll also find a feature about the complex relationships between people and dogs in Third World countries, a Humane Law Forum on the thorny issue of adopters who give an animal to a third party, and a "101" Department

Protect Against Carbon Monoxide

I wanted to share with you all an important, eye-opening experience that happened here at our shelter. Our vet clinic staff smelled smoke and thought they saw smoke. I figured it was the heat kicking on for the first time here in chilly Massachusetts. It happens every year when the heat first goes on ... smells like burning for a few minutes.

Just for safety's sake I called our fire department and asked them to come out to check our carbon monoxide levels. Immediately when they walked in, the detectors started picking up readings of carbon monoxide from 30 to 44 [parts per million]—when they should be zero.

Thankfully it was less than an hour from the time staff noticed it until the fire department came out, but carbon monoxide is

explaining the importance of basic intake exams.

Beyond our pages, you'll find tips galore at Animal Care Expo, set for May 4 through 7 at Disney's Coronado Springs Resort in Orlando, Fla. Expo is the world's largest training conference and trade show for animal welfare workers. It offers workshops on cutting-edge techniques, displays of the latest products in the field, and a chance for you to network with your peers and get reinvigorated about the life-saving work you do. For information, go to animalsheltering.org/expo or call 800-248-EXPO.

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

odorless and colorless, so it was quite by accident that it was detected. The paramedics came out to monitor our staff as a precaution, and none of the staff monitored had any symptoms of exposure. After [staff were] out of the building for only a few minutes, [the readings] were back to zero.

So the lesson learned is to make sure all your buildings and floors have a carbon monoxide detector in them, and that they are working. We used to have one in our clinic, but the anesthesia machines and all our equipment started setting them off on a daily basis, so we removed them. We've updated our protocols and have moved machines around and reset/updated the buildings with new carbon monoxide units with fresh batteries.

The fire chief told me that the carbon monoxide detectors would have picked up a read-

ing at 0.09 and alerted us, and we were at 30 to 44. Had the staff been exposed to that all day, we may have had some real issues ... and I don't even want to think about that. I hope everyone learns from our experience.

On a side note, I also encourage you all who have on-site vet clinics to make sure your equipment is serviced/updated and calibrated yearly to monitor the readings of the anesthesia units. Though it's somewhat expensive, it will extend the life of your equipment, keep your pets and staff safe, and generally give your staff the feeling that you are concerned for their well-being.

Leigh Grady, Executive Director
Animal Shelter Inc.
Sterling, Mass.

Good Reading

The November-December 2010 issue of *Animal Sheltering* is one of the best issues yet. Three articles in particular were very interesting and helpful: "Whose Animal is it?" (p. 47), "Rescued from Squalor" (p. 22), and "For Better and For Worse" (p. 8). I'm still working on reading through it in between everything else we do here, but I wanted to let you know that your magazine keeps me up to date in all areas of sheltering.

Rosemary Lyons, Education Coordinator
Pasco County Animal Services
Land O'Lakes, Fla.

Correction

"Once More, With Spirit" (Nov-Dec 2010, p. 14) inaccurately noted that Jackson, the Weimaraner/pit bull mix who traveled across the country on his way to a new home, was at one point scheduled for euthanasia. According to Joe Pulcinella of the Rancho Cucamonga Animal Care and Services Department in California, the shelter which originally cared for Jackson, the dog had gone through a training class, was getting lots of attention from volunteers, and was very adoptable.

Studying Cats—and Those Who Care for Them

Recent studies look at practices regarding identification and feral identification procedures

BY CARRIE ALLAN

Cats: They're everywhere. Curled up happily in homes, dodging cars on the streets, eking out an existence in managed feral colonies, and filling up shelters around the country. Even in areas where adoptable dogs fly out the doors of animal shelters—and in some cases, rarely enter them—cat numbers are still a challenge for people trying to figure out how to reduce their overpopulation and the resulting suffering and euthanasia.

Two recent studies examined issues related to the survival of cats, in the regular world and in shelters. One group of researchers looked at the methods used by shelters and rescues to distinguish feral cats from frightened cats; the other sought to test how many among a group of owned

cats could successfully and safely wear collars for six months.

Both studies are worth reading in their entirety, especially by those working on feline issues. Their findings are illuminating, and the results from the first survey—which indicate a vast disparity in the methods used to separate feral cats from those who are simply freaked-out—emphasize the need for education on the second. Persuading more cat owners to collar and tag their kitties has the potential to reduce the number of cats who end up being treated as ferals due to fearfulness and lack of identification.

In “A survey of the methods used in shelter and rescue programs to identify feral and frightened pet cats,” (*Journal of Feline*



DANBRANDBER/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

Medicine and Surgery, Vol. 12, No. 8) researchers Margaret Slater et. al write that the way an animal shelter handles an incoming cat depends largely on how the cat is categor-

“Thank you so much for

making this program available to the New Orleans community. I am convinced that had this been in place prior to Katrina, many more reunions would have happened.

Live and learn, sometimes in the most painful ways. Regardless, learn.”

Shelly Patton
Events Coordinator
Louisiana SPCA



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rized—the outcomes can be vastly different depending on whether shelter staff believe the animal to be a frightened stray or a truly feral cat. “Cats must generally be sheltered for a minimum holding period to permit the owner to reclaim ... However, in some circumstances, there is no legal requirement to hold cats who are thought to be feral and it is the policy of many shelters to euthanise cats deemed to be feral,” the authors write.

To examine the common approaches for making these determinations, the researchers surveyed a range of animal welfare organizations. They got responses from 555 respondents in 44 states, 11 from Canada, and a smattering from other regions of the world. The most common types of programs were nonprofit “brick-and-mortar” shelters, trap-neuter-return (TNR) organizations, and animal control agencies.

Overall, though assorted behavioral assessments were likely to be conducted, “some programs simply used the criterion that if a cat arrived in a trap it was considered to be feral, without any behavioral assessment.” What’s more, 85 percent of respondents said their group had no written guidelines for how feral vs. frightened determinations should be made. And a substantial number of groups euthanized cats as soon as they were categorized as feral—even though 288 respondents (more than half) noted that they had had cases where a cat first thought to be feral was later determined not to be.

On the brighter side, 66 percent said that TNR was at least sometimes an option for cats believed to be feral. “Minimum holding times were highly varied, with 1-3 days common among all organizations and most common for animal control programs,” the researchers write. “A surprisingly high number of other groups ... were able to hold cats at least 7 days.”

Noting the high number of respondents to the survey, the researchers write that they believe there is “a wide audience for a still-to-be-developed valid and easily applied tool to determine if a cat is or is not feral.”

This mixed bag of findings makes the results from the second study—Linda K. Lord et. al’s long-awaited examination of cat collaring and chipping—all the more relevant.

In “Evaluation of collars and microchips for visual and permanent identification of

pet cats” (*Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, Vol. 237, No. 4), researchers aimed to find out what percentage of pet cats would still have functioning microchips and be wearing collars after six months.

Of cats entering shelters with an unknown ownership status, less than 2 percent are reunited with their owners compared with 15-19 percent of lost dogs, the researchers note, pointing out that one reason for this disparity may be that many owners don’t give their cats any form of identification. They cite an earlier survey conducted in Ohio, in which only 17 percent of cat owners surveyed said they use some sort of visual ID, and only 3 percent use microchips. Beyond the various reasons those owners provided for their behavior, “A general dogma apparently exists among cat owners and veterinarians that cats cannot wear collars or will be injured by them,” the authors write.

For this study, a total of 538 cats belonging to 338 owners were assigned to wear one of three different types of collar—a plastic buckle collar, a breakaway plastic buckle collar, or an elastic stretch safety collar. All participating cats were microchipped for the test (cats who had previously implanted chips were excluded from the study). Owners answered questions about what they expected and about their experiences at the beginning and end of the six-month study.

The outcome: Nearly 73 percent of cats were able to wear their collars for the entire six-month period. Owners’ willingness to replace a collar, as well as their initial expectations of how well their cat would fare at retaining/wearing it, were both predictive of cats’ success; those owners who felt more positively about their cats wearing collars were more likely to have cats who succeeded in wearing them longer. Of the 478 cats who were scanned for chips at the end of the study, 477 had chips that were still functional.

“Results of the study reported here suggested that approximately three-fourths of cats could successfully wear a collar,” the authors write. Most microchips remained functional, and few had migrated from their original implantation site.

In conclusion, they write, “We believe that both visual and permanent identifica-

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 on how shelter visitors can help keep the animals healthy.
- To read more responses from readers to our Coffee Break question for this issue, go to animalsheltering.org/publications/magazine/coffee_break.
- To watch video of the free shot clinic and spay/neuter awareness event in North Carolina, go to humanesociety.org/churchclinics.
- To watch video of one pit bull’s journey through the Humane Society of Missouri’s post-dogfighting-raid temporary shelter, go to humanesociety.org/faceofdogfighting.
- To apply to the Emergency Services Placement Partner program (ESPP), an initiative of The Humane Society of the United States, go to animalsheltering.org/espp.
- Read one volunteer’s story of a rescue effort that changed her life—and united her with a dog she believes was meant to be her companion. Go to animalsheltering.org/sweet_dream.

tion are essential components of a comprehensive preventive medical plan for cats. ... Veterinarians can play a life-saving role in increasing recovery through education and implementation of wellness protocols that include visual and permanent identification of cats.” 

Making the Mean Streets a Little Kinder

In Portland, an animal welfare group keeps people in mind

His name is Cubby, and he's here because of a mole. It's likely harmless, that small growth on the leg of this 13-year-old Pomeranian-spitz mix. Nevertheless, his human is worried.

Of course it doesn't take much to worry Lawrence C. (last name withheld). "I have a problem with my temper," says Lawrence, a 330-pound giant of a man with a booming voice and a huge presence. "I used to punch people when they said 'Hi.' With Cubby, I don't lose my temper as much. He knows what I need."

Cubby and Lawrence are first in line for this month's free veterinary clinic sponsored by the Portland Animal Welfare (PAW) Team. Being first took some doing. The pair arrived at 6 a.m., six hours before the clinic opened. The line behind them, now stretching around the block, includes hundreds of animals and their human companions waiting to get in the door.

Yvette Maxwell is 50. Her one-eyed cat, Herman, is maybe 3. Yvette found him in the street, badly injured. He had a microchip that led nowhere. "He was just dumped," she says. Looking up from beneath her baseball cap, Yvette whispers behind her cupped hand, "I just heard someone say, 'Do you have your food stamps card?' I'm



CATHERINE BRINKMAN-DANTAS/DANTAS PHOTOGRAPHY

In the past, the PAW Team clinics might have treated 60 animals over the course of a day; they now average more than double that figure.

so embarrassed. But now I'm studying to cut hair."

The PAW Team was created in the early '90s to serve Portland's street people. From the get-go, says executive director Wendy Kohn, its mission raised some hackles. "How can the homeless even think of having animals?" she says naysayers complained. "They can't take care of themselves!" On seeing a panhandler with an animal companion, they'd say, "That poor dog must be starving!"

Wrong, says Kohn, after years of observation. "Street people will willingly go without their own food in order to feed their pets."

Lawrence C., for example, fears for his sanity without his beloved Cubby. His animal keeps him balanced and alive.

"People who are on the streets obviously made mistakes or suffered a series of calamities in their lives," says Kohn. "And whether [they're] incarcerated, divorced, without a job or on drugs, their animal is the only creature in their lives that doesn't judge, doesn't care."

Advocacy for street people and their four-legged families has grown immeasurably

since the PAW Team first opened for business. Today, the scope of its mission has changed as well, and its client base has expanded.

"Since 2008, more middle-class people have been showing up at our clinics," says Mary Blankevoort, D.V.M., a member of the PAW Team board. "I've even seen a few people who used to be in my private practice. Now they're lining up to get in here."

Standing in a sidewalk line, just one of hundreds in need, is a far cry from waiting in the clean and quiet space of a private clinic. But the quality of care at a PAW Team clinic is just as singular, as a rotating team of veterinarians and vet techs focuses on individual animals despite all the goings-on in this supermarket-like space. On offer is a smorgasbord of services: medical exams, vaccines, county licensing, flea treatment, and for the hopelessly matted, grooming.

The PAW Team first took to the streets with MASH-style tents and offered clinics quarterly. Today, it holds clinics the first Sunday of every month. In the past, its volunteer staff might have seen 60 animals in a day. It now averages 12 dozen.



CATHERINE BRINKMAN-DANTAS/DANTAS PHOTOGRAPHY

Lawrence C. and his dog Cubby are among the many who've benefited from the free veterinary clinics hosted by the Portland Animal Welfare (PAW) Team.

This past October, the clinic ministered to a staggering 170 animals. Volunteer veterinarians treated everything from Cubby's harmless tumor to the conjunctivitis of a one-eyed cat named Herman. "One hundred and seventy animals is not a record we want to repeat!" says Kohn. "We intended to cap the number at 150, but our incredible volunteers stayed late. Still, it's just too hard on them."

Portland, Ore., is a wildly animal-crazed city. In fact, it was recently voted the most pet friendly city in the U.S. on the website livability.com. That could help explain why the PAW Team is flush with volunteers, typically 100 kind civilians and 10 veterinarians, among them oncologists and doctors from the state health department and Oregon Humane Society.

Yet even this zone of pet-friendliness has been affected by the recession. Funding is tight. A PAW Team clinic costs an estimated \$6,000, and the organization chickenscratches for the cash.

Kohn recites its litany of financial support. "Individuals, tabling at local events, e-mail solicitations, and word-of-mouth. Small grants, fundraisers by animal-related businesses, and at every clinic, a donations jar."

The PAW Team's biggest cash layout is for flea treatments and vaccines. Right now, through the largess of a local business, the team pays only utilities for its desirable Portland location. The rent's free. This means

the PAW Team is enjoying the extraordinary luxury of staying put: No more schlepping every clip board, blanket, and chair to a revolving carousel of one-day events. But no one knows how long the largess will last.

The scene inside today's clinic feels a lot like a school fair, as people and animals flow from booth to booth sampling the medical wares. Ten triage-like units staffed by vets and techs are hives of activity as clients move from table to table. Despite what board member Marilee Muzatko describes as "little eddies of chaos," the line appears to move with impressive efficiency and surprising calm.

And then there's the paperwork trail: The PAW Team's client files are kept in a database going back an astonishing 10 years. The organization has an arsenal of means to stay abreast of its clients—among them, a blonde sleuth in capri pants and sneakers who's always on the prowl.

Her name is Robyn Luchs. Her nametag reads "Spay and Neuter Goddess." Like many a deity, however, she has another, fiercer side. "If someone says 'No' to me when I ask, 'Are you planning to have your animal fixed?' I become the Spay and Neuter ..."—well, let's just say it rhymes with witch.

Case in point: Luchs has been tipped off that a PAW client with a beautiful brindle pit is a breeder. She asks the woman if it's true. Confirmed.

"You breed them, and I get to see the county fire up the incinerator every week,"

she says in a matter-of-fact way. Nodding, the woman makes it clear she is having her young dog neutered, but hesitates when asked about the two dogs at home.

The Goddess cajoles her. "We can do all three at once!"

At any given clinic, Luchs finds an average of 30-50 intact animals. She then schedules surgery at a participating clinic. "If people are a no-show," she says, "their charts are flagged. If they're a no-show twice, they're rejected from PAW."

Surgeries are handled by a number of local organizations, including Portland's county shelter, Multnomah County Animal Services. "We deal with all the animal agencies in all of Portland," says director Mike Oswald. "The PAW Team has become the key organization offering vet care to a population that otherwise wouldn't get it." What's more, Oswald says, "Any service that can keep pets with their owners benefits the shelter community. Fewer are abandoned and surrendered. That absolutely takes some of the burden off."

Ultimately, in both its practices and philosophy, the PAW Team sees itself as an advocacy group for both animals and underserved people. Its growing ambition is to bridge the gap between Portland's social service agencies and its animal welfare groups. Top on the team's list is to see the creation of animal housing adjacent to or within homeless shelters, enabling the homeless to remain with, or near, their best friends.

Blankevoort has an even broader view of the service her organization provides. "We're involved in community health," she says. "We offer parasite control and prevent communicable diseases, like rabies. If the animals are healthier, their people are healthier. Which means the city and the community are healthier, too." 

Ketzel Levine is a freelance journalist based in Portland, Ore. Her animal family includes Zoe Mae, canine force of nature; Starlet, the ever-hungry beagle; and Lulah, the perfect cat.



CATHERINE BRINKMAN-DANTAS/DANTAS PHOTOGRAPHY

Cubby sits patiently as volunteer groomer Robin Laramore checks out his mole.

[scoop]

A Plea for Civility

Pledge aims to promote polite discourse in the sheltering and rescue community

BY JAMES HETTINGER

In the Internet age, it's easier than ever to be nasty. When someone's got a gripe, they can post it online—anonously, with little regard to whether it's fair, accurate, or personally abusive.

It's a problem across the Web, but it's had particular ramifications in the animal welfare community, where nonstop attacks can make life miserable and drive people out of the field.

"Shelters are, more than ever, under attack for the decisions they make, or the decisions they don't make, or their philosophies, and the attacks that are being launched against them are becoming much more sophisticated and much more coordinated," says Inga Fricke, director of sheltering initiatives for The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS).



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People being angry about shelter policies is hardly new; Fricke recalls hearing that, decades ago, threats prompted the founders of her first shelter to sleep with shotguns. But Fricke believes that current differences in sheltering philosophies—particularly over the “no-kill” question—have mobilized a vocal minority to take forceful action, from lawsuits to bomb threats. And with the advent of Facebook and other social networking sites, she adds, “People who are unhappy can link up very easily with other people who are unhappy, and they tend to feed on each other and really escalate.”

In an effort to cool down the overheated rhetoric and promote more respectful behavior, leaders in The HSUS’s Companion Animals department last year developed a three-paragraph civility pledge, “Humane Discourse and Conduct Within Animal Welfare.” The pledge calls for its signers to “reject and condemn verbal abuse, threats, and acts of violence directed against animal welfare personnel.”

Posted Nov. 7 on The HSUS’s animalsheltering.org, the pledge within weeks had been signed by nearly 200 individuals and about 100 organizations, from national advocacy groups like the ASPCA to local animal control agencies and rescue groups. The pledge’s drafters hope it helps thwart abusive language and behavior by promoting a more civil standard. The pledge doesn’t aim to stop anyone from speaking out against animal abuses or cruelty, Fricke says. “It’s just essentially a reminder to everyone that we are all people in the business of protecting animals, and we can’t get down to business if we’re fighting each other.”

Ideally, she adds, the pledge will gather so many signatures that it can’t be ignored, and people will wonder why an organization would refuse to agree to engage in civil conduct.

Promoting more reasonable discourse appears to be a trend in the animal welfare community. A recent Society of Animal

Welfare Administrators (SAWA) conference featured a crisis management presentation (“What to Do When Bad Things Happen to Dedicated People”) that included a guide to surviving social media attacks. The ASPCA has launched a website (noharmnkill.com) that stresses community cooperation as a key to saving animals’ lives.

Karel Minor, executive director of the Humane Society of Berks County in Pennsylvania, says the humane discourse pledge is necessary in light of the personal attacks plaguing the animal welfare movement and the “bigger megaphone” of modern communications. “We’re in a very serious business—it is literally life and death what we do—but that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t take a deep breath occasionally, and find a less offensive way to say the sometimes very serious and sometimes pointed things we have to say.” [AS](#)

To view the pledge, go to animalsheltering.org/pledge.



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The "Neighborly" Approach to Saving Pets

Pregnant ACO doesn't pause when fire strikes her apartment complex

The local news media called her a hero, but animal control officer Aimee Wesley says she was just being neighborly.

On the afternoon of Sept. 21, Wesley, who was four months pregnant, had gone home for lunch at Fairway Park Apartments in the northern Kentucky town of Independence. When she headed back outside to get in her animal control truck, she looked at the apartment building 30 feet in front of hers and saw smoke coming from the top. A second-floor balcony had caught fire, and the blaze had spread to the third floor.

Someone had already called 911, so the fire department was on its way. Wesley and her husband, who was the on-call maintenance man for the apartment complex, became the first rescuers to enter the building. They walked through hallways that were filling with smoke, knocking on doors to get the people out.



Animal control officer Aimee Wesley, second from left, watches the blaze and confers with the fire chief during a September fire at an apartment complex in Independence, Ky. Wesley, four months pregnant at the time, alerted residents to the fire and retrieved 13 of their pets.

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Breeding Discontents

In April, the Humane Society Institute for Science and Policy will host a conference on the health and welfare of purebred dogs. What are the welfare and ethical issues arising from dog breeding practices? And what do science, history, sociology, and public policy perspectives have to say on the subject? **Join the discussion April 28-29, 2011, with a roster of distinguished speakers from leading institutions around the world at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC.** For more information and to register, go to purebredparadox.com.

Firefighters arrived to douse the blaze, and the residents gathered in the parking lot were “just standing there kind of in awe,” Wesley recalls.

Concerned about the safety of their pets, Wesley’s neighbors turned to her. Everyone at the complex knows her by name and knows her occupation, she explains, “so they sought me out in the crowd to tell me that their animals were still inside. ... I was the only person that they could say, ‘Please go get my cat.’”

It took an hour or so before Wesley, accompanied by firefighters, could reenter the building and search for people’s pets. With the help of fellow Kenton County ACO Jimmy Boling, she retrieved 13 of them: six cats, two dogs, a snake, a lizard, a goldfish, a lovebird, and a rabbit. “It was quite the menagerie,” she says.

The fire produced some striking rescue stories. The snake’s tank fell from the third floor to the second floor as the fire raged, but he made it out unharmed, Wesley marvels. One pregnant tenant initially fled her second-floor apartment, unable to find her cat or lift her lizard’s cage—but both were eventually rescued.

The thought that she perhaps shouldn’t be running around a burning building while pregnant “didn’t really occur to me,” Wesley says. Her pregnancy wasn’t that far along, her doctor hadn’t restricted her activities, and she didn’t breathe smoke for an excessive amount of time. Afterward she called her doctor, who said she and the baby should be fine.

In the chaos of the firefighting responses and the evacuation, if Wesley couldn’t immediately find an owner, she crated the animal, and her husband took the crates to their apartment, Wesley explains. The couple at one point had five crates, but all the owners were found by around 9:30 that night.

As far as Wesley knows, the only animals who failed to survive the fire were two parakeets on the third floor. Twenty-two families were burned out of their homes, but there

were no reported injuries among the residents.

The fire and the efforts to extinguish it left the surviving animals frightened and soggy. “Every animal that we got out of there, we basically had to hunt them down,” Boling says, explaining that the scared pets were hiding under couches and beds.

Wesley adds, “Most of the animals that I brought out were soaking, sopping wet from the amount of water that [firefighters] were pumping into the third floor.”

For many tenants, their animals were “really the only thing that they wanted” to recover from the fire, Wesley says. As an owner of three dogs, Wesley says she understands that attitude; animals, after all, can’t be replaced.

“One apartment, they had three cats, and when we brought them out, it was kind of overwhelming for [the tenants], with the damage that was done, knowing that their animals were still alive and actually in good health,” Boling recalls. “They were overjoyed.”

Some local news reports focused on Wesley’s rescue efforts, turning her into a reluctant hero. She recalls with a laugh that one local newscaster dubbed her “Wonder Woman.”

“I didn’t really welcome any of the media attention,” she says. Wesley spoke to reporters off-camera to correct the initial reports that all the animals had died, and to provide updates on when tenants could retrieve their belongings. “These are people that I know. It wasn’t like I was driving past and these were complete strangers. It was more personal. Even though I was there in an official capacity, it was personal for me.”

Wesley and her husband have since moved out of the apartment complex, but they’re likely to remember the anniversary of the fire, which occurred on her husband’s birthday. “We had to cancel our dinner reservations,” she says, laughing. 



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Travels with Bernie

Foster-and-rescue program's transport model gives thousands of dogs a second chance



JOE FRAZZ PHOTOGRAPHY

Bernie Berlin with one of the many shelter dogs she has rescued through A Place to Bark. Her nonprofit transported more than 700 dogs to partnering shelters in 2010.

In 2009, A Place to Bark Animal Rescue transported more than 600 dogs from rural animal control shelters in Tennessee to the Anti-Cruelty Society in Chicago for adoption. In 2010, the rescue started transporting pets to a second partnering shelter, and that number increased to more than 700 dogs. In the past five years, the rescue has fostered and placed more than 2,500 pets.

These figures are remarkable when you consider that A Place to Bark, based in Portland, Tenn., is made up of Bernadette "Bernie" Berlin, who founded the rescue in 2001; two part-time employees who help her care for the dogs in a facility at her home; and a friend of Berlin's who helps her transport the pets twice a month in a rented cargo van.

Berlin shoulders much of the responsibility herself—with some moral and logistical support from her enormous social network. "I've got almost 27,000 followers on Twitter. I have more than 4,000 friends on Facebook,

with another 1,000 waiting for me to approve them," she says. Berlin's constantly posting videos to YouTube, blogging, or updating her website, and she says that social networking has been her greatest resource. "Reaching out to animal lovers in other parts of the country, and receiving help when needed most, has made it possible to continue saving as many animals in need [as I can]," Berlin says. "I have a huge reach, via the Internet."

She networks offline, too, building relationships with The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), the ASPCA, Best Friends Animal Society, and animal control officers across Tennessee. She's often called on to take animals seized from cruelty cases, puppy mill raids, and hoarding situations.

"Bernie has been a really great friend to HSUS. She's one of the top three go-to people for me in the state. Any time we need assistance with placement of animals ... she's

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always there to help," says HSUS Tennessee state director Leighann McCollum.

Berlin says she never expected the volume she's handling. "I'm constantly going. If a dog breaks with parvo, I'm [working] around the clock with those dogs," she says.

When Berlin's not at animal control shelters pulling dogs, she's caring for them at her facility—the rescue has 10,000 square feet of outdoor kenneling, plus a 2,000-square-foot outbuilding, all on her 20 acres—or transporting them to Chicago or a Florida partnering shelter. She routinely visits rural animal control shelters, mostly in middle Tennessee, where she pulls dogs who she thinks are highly adoptable, including many puppies. She takes them back to her facility, where they get full vet care, vaccinations, time to settle in (which also serves as a quarantine period), socialization, and rehabilitation.

Then, about twice a month, Berlin and her friend Glenda Campbell load a cargo van with anywhere from 25 to nearly 60 dogs in stacked carriers, and drive the eight to nine hours to Chicago, or about 16 hours to the Peggy Adams Animal Rescue League of the Palm Beaches in West Palm Beach, Fla. For six years, Berlin did all the driving herself; more recently, she has paid Campbell to help her on the transports.

As soon as the pets arrive at the two partnering shelters, they receive physical exams, are spayed or neutered, and are put on the adoption floor. Most of them get adopted within five to seven days, according to Berlin. She takes back those dogs who don't get adopted within two weeks, or who don't

do well in the shelter for some reason, and continues to work with them.

"Over the course of time, we've learned to trust Bernie, and when she calls us and tells us she's found some remarkably adoptable dogs, we just say 'OK,' because we know enough to accept her at her word," says the Anti-Cruelty Society's vice president of operations, David Dinger. "What makes Bernie special is she's not just pulling these animals out, and running them up to the big city. She takes the time and puts in the energy and resources to provide some basic care for these animals before they get transported into an urban shelter setting."

In Chicago, puppies are in great demand, and people who are adamant about getting a puppy will go to a pet store if a shelter doesn't have any, according to Dinger. The puppies and young dogs Berlin transports to the Anti-Cruelty Society bring people into the shelter, and offer exposure to adult animals awaiting adoption. The shelter, he notes, continues to take transfers of pets from animal control and local humane societies.

Berlin has been transporting animals to the Chicago shelter for about five years. But she just did her first transport of dogs to the Florida shelter in spring 2010, followed by a second transport last November. "We've had great success in finding those dogs homes quickly, and so that's led to expanding our relationship [with Berlin]," says David Miller, executive director/CEO of Peggy Adams.

Funding remains the nonprofit rescue's biggest challenge. Because it's a shelter-to-shelter program, A Place to Bark doesn't receive adoption fees, so it has to rely on private donations of funds, food, and other supplies. "Every day is a challenge to keep our doors open," Berlin says.

But she has no plans to quit, though the job is draining, and there's an endless supply of pets in need. "Saving these helpless animals, and doing whatever it takes to get them into loving homes—that's the reward. They save me as much as I save them," Berlin says. **AS**

To learn more about A Place to Bark Animal Rescue, visit aplacetobark.com.



Bernadette "Bernie" Berlin enjoys a lighter moment with one of her rescued dogs.

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[scoop]

Creating a Career Ladder Through Certification

BY HAROLD DATES, CAWA



For years, many devoted managers in animal welfare have been committed to the field and to their work, but have had no clear means of professional advancement. What does a career ladder look like in animal sheltering?

In 2002, industry leader members of the Society of Animal Welfare Administrators (SAWA) embarked on an effort to make that clearer, and to provide a means to measure the knowledge and skills of shelter professionals. They looked into the future and saw the possibility of respected, widespread, highly educated professionals working together to save more animals' lives. Volunteers worked with an expert to design a leadership development program unique to animal welfare, care, and control: the Certified Animal Welfare Administrator (CAWA) accreditation program.

Implemented in 2004, the accreditation program allows qualified professionals (both SAWA and non-SAWA members) to test themselves by meeting rigorous standards set by peer professionals. One must pass a challenging exam to achieve the CAWA distinction. Those who have the knowledge to pass the test exhibit advanced skills in leadership, administration, management, personnel supervision, public relations, fundraising, animal care and treatment, and reasoning.

If you're looking toward a long career in animal welfare, you should know that the boards of directors of humane organizations and the human resources departments of animal control agencies already see the value of hiring a chief executive officer/executive director who has achieved the CAWA designation. They want a leader with well-rounded experience and unique animal welfare knowledge to support their mission and long-term growth. They know that the community will benefit from the leadership of an executive whose certification communicates expertise: Donors understand the commitment of the organization to spend funds wisely, and staff gain a leader and mentor with the highest competence.

In addition, industry partners (such as pet nutrition, pet health, administrative software, human resources, and development companies) have taken notice of the certification program and support our efforts to continually professionalize the industry. They see peers, with quality staff, working together in collaboration and supporting the mission to improve lives of the animals we serve.

Currently the CAWA exam is given once a year in two geographic locations. Those studying for the exam can get support from SAWA in a number of ways:

- A sample test is available, with concepts equivalent to the actual exam.
- Applicants are directed to a recommended reading list, and the cost of some reading materials is paid by SAWA.
- Applicants network on a CAWA-only listserv, supported by CAWA mentors.
- Applicants can join a CAWA study group to share notes, write sample questions, and network.

Candidates must have a minimum of three years experience as a CEO (or management-level position reporting directly to the CEO, chief operating officer, director of operations, or an equivalent position) in an animal sheltering agency. Two years of management experience as CEO (or senior management

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SAWA 2011 Conference Schedule

- Management Conference, Charlotte, N.C., June 8-10
- Annual Conference, San Francisco, Calif., Nov. 13-15

position) of a nonprofit or public agency in another field can substitute for part of the required experience.

Learn more about this unmatched opportunity at sawanetwork.org. If you have questions, please e-mail admin@SAWANetwork.org. If your organization is seeking a CEO/executive director, we encourage you to request "CAWA Preferred" on your job posting. **AS**

Harold Dates is president & CEO of SPCA Cincinnati and Certification Committee Chair of the Society of Animal Welfare Administrators (SAWA).



People aren't the **only** ones who get the sniffles and sneezes.

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After you spend time with one animal, it's a good idea to wash your hands with hot water and soap—or at least use hand sanitizer—before petting another one, and again before you go home to your own pets.

Thank you for helping us keep the cats and dogs sneeze-free ... and ready to go home with their new families!



[scoop]

Pit Bull Palace

Staff and volunteers transform a rented warehouse into a place of healing for hundreds of abused animals

BY JIM BAKER

Julie Brinker keeps a few mementos to remind her of some of the special animals she has worked with as staff veterinarian at the Humane Society of Missouri.

There's a picture of Daisy, a dog she nursed back to health from repeated bouts of illness, who was later adopted. A photo of two puppies asleep in a water bowl. An ID tag from Handsome, a big, yellow pit bull who was too aggressive to be placed.

And another tag, stamped "153"—representing all the puppies born during a span of time at the shelter, who would never have to experience dogfighting.

"That's on my keychain," she says.

Brinker met and cared for each of these animals over a period of seven months, when the Humane Society of Missouri took on a task far greater than its usual already-full plate of running three animal shelters. From July 2009 until February 2010, the organization ran a temporary shelter for 407 pit bull terriers and pit bull mixes—and 153 puppies born after the dogs' arrival.

The dogs were rescued in 2009 as part of a larger operation when federal, state, and



Humane Society of Missouri volunteer Janet Roach plays with three of the 153 puppies born at the temporary shelter housing hundreds of pit bulls.

county law enforcement agencies made arrests and seized dogs in eight states—the largest one-day series of federal dogfighting raids in U.S. history. The Humane Society of the United States assisted authorities in this effort.

All of the dogs rescued from the 22 sites in Missouri and Illinois were transported to a 25,000-square-foot temporary shelter that the Humane Society of Missouri rented and prepared for the dogs in the weeks preceding the raids. That site—which came to be known as "Pit Bull Palace"—served as their home, as 120 shelter staff and more than 300 volunteers from 14 states and Canada cycled through, healing their wounds, treating their illnesses, and finding homes for as many as possible.

Dealing with a sudden influx of sick, injured, and unsocialized dogs is nothing new for the organization. Based in a state with an estimated 3,000 puppy mills, the shelter is often asked to take in large numbers of dogs—but little could have adequately prepared staff and volunteers for an effort of this magnitude.

"When you think of [so many] fighting pit bulls in a temporary shelter ... you look at that, and you say, 'It shouldn't have been possible. That's crazy,'" says Debbie Hill, vice president of operations for the Humane Society of Missouri, who led the sheltering team. "But, you know, they did it, and they did it well."

It's especially impressive given that—due to the secret nature of the operation—only a small number of staff knew about the impending raids, the temporary shelter had to be readied as discreetly as possible, and a maximum of only 250-300 dogs was expected.

"It's pretty common for us to bring in a couple hundred dogs from hoarders or puppy mills. But 400 dogs that want to eat each other, on top of our normal population, in a facility that we set up literally the week before ..." says Brinker, who was in charge of medical care at the temporary site.

Most shelter staff had no idea about the raids or the shelter being prepared. Rumor



Veterinarian Matt Shivelbine, seated at left, performs surgery on an injured dog at the temporary shelter on the day of the eight-state raid. Many of the dogs brought to the site needed immediate medical care for illness and injuries.

was that the site would house dogs from a puppy mill raid. “As we gathered, waiting for the first dogs to come off the trucks, they were told, ‘It’s pit bulls. It’s dogfighting. They are going to want to eat each other. Here are the new rules,’” Brinker says.

Staff made every effort to minimize visual contact among the dogs, most of whom had been trained to be dog-aggressive. And runs had to be arranged so that if a dog got loose, he couldn’t get to another dog. Staff bought up a huge supply of heavy-gauge wire fencing and lengths of landscape fabric to create secure runs that also blocked the dogs from easily seeing each other. Runs were set up in aisles, with gates at each end.

Staff and volunteers soon discovered that the dogs, many of whom would snarl and lunge at each other, were extremely friendly toward people. “It was amazing that these dogs that had been marketed by their previous owners as vicious, when we took them out of their kennels, they sat on our laps, and licked us,” says Laura Renner, the shelter’s volunteer manager.

Medical care was a huge, ongoing challenge. Upon intake, veterinarians had to examine all the dogs, noting their condition, injuries, and illnesses, then begin treating them. They received vaccinations, were tested for heartworms, were dewormed, had their nails clipped and their ears cleaned, and other routine care at admission.

Then the real work began. Many of the dogs were in dire condition, either terribly sick, suffering ghastly wounds, or both. “We had a dog come in with a body condition score of one. The next step down is dead,” Brinker says. “We had a dog come in who was literally ripped to shreds—down to the cartilage on his nose—who was smiling at us and wagging his tail and wanting to kiss you, and he stank to high heaven because his wounds were so infected.”

(The dog Brinker refers to, a pit bull whom the staff named Stallone, is the subject of an HSUS video, “The Face of Dogfighting.” View it at humanesociety.org/faceofdogfighting.



Aside from 120 staff members from the Humane Society of Missouri who worked at the temporary shelter, more than 300 volunteers from 14 states and Canada cycled through the site, too. Some volunteers used their own vacation time, and traveled to St. Louis at their own expense, to help the dogs.

The outpouring of support astounded staff. Volunteers called from shelters and rescue groups around the country, offering help. “We had people who would come multiple times. It’s almost like sometimes you couldn’t get them to go home. People would take their vacations and come volunteer with us, because it meant that much to them to help those animals,” Hill says.

The work was physically, mentally, and emotionally draining—and expensive. Because the FBI was involved, the federal government reimbursed the shelter for some of the costs incurred, but the rest—hundreds of thousands of dollars—came from the shelter’s coffers. But she has no regrets that the shelter participated. “You couldn’t turn your back on them, you just couldn’t. You had to be there for them.”

The operation was remarkably successful. Staff and volunteers were able to place far more of them than they’d hoped. “Initially, we were told to expect 5 percent of those dogs, maybe 10 percent, might be able to find new homes. We were successful in placing over 250 of them,” says Linda Campbell, director of shelter pet training, who supervised behavioral evaluations for

all the dogs. (The others were determined to be either too sick, too injured, or too dog-aggressive to be adopted out, and were euthanized.)

On July 10, 2010, the shelter hosted the “Missouri 500 Reunion,” a memorial tribute to celebrate the effort’s accomplishments, thank staff and volunteers who participated, and remember the dogs who didn’t make it. Some of the people who’d adopted dogs and puppies from the raid brought them back to the event. “It was really remarkable to see how good they were doing, and to have in this one area these [formerly] vicious fighting dogs that didn’t get into fights,” Renner says.

It wasn’t just the dogs who passed through the temporary shelter who were marked by the intense experience. It left a deep impression on the rescuers and the caregivers, too. “I heard one of our staff say there was her life before the rescue, and there was her life after it, and I would have to agree with that. It certainly changes your perspective on how resilient animals can be, even when they come from terrible, horrible places,” Renner says. “And also how dedicated people can be.” 

[scoop]

Churches Go to the Dogs (And Cats)

Animal advocates partner with two congregations to provide veterinary care to a North Carolina community

BY JIM BAKER

When Stephen Owen thinks about his family's dog, it stirs thoughts of his faith.

"I truly believe pets are a gift from God. We recently bought a chocolate Lab, and just the smile it brings to my kids' faces when they see him ... It's obvious to me that pets are special to people, because God gave them to us, and it's our duty to protect and to help what God gives us, to be good stewards," he says.

The connection he makes might come as a surprise to some, but Owen—associate pastor of Shallow Well Church, a United Church

of Christ congregation in Sanford, N.C.—thinks it makes perfect sense. It's a model that Gutleben has used elsewhere in the country—New Orleans, for instance—with great success. The idea is to encourage pastors and their congregations to think about animals in the context of faith, to get them to think broadly about stewardship and our responsibility toward all of God's creatures—including pets.

Many shelters might study the approach: If you want to reach people, go where they are rather than waiting for them to come to you. "Working with churches to address these issues is incredibly effective," says Gutleben. "In many cases, they're the center of their community, and they provide essential services, especially in underserved communities." Helping people care for their pets is a natural extension of those services, Gutleben adds.

It didn't take much work to convince Owen, and the Rev. Mark Gaskins of Jonesboro Heights Baptist Church, to participate in the vaccine and spay/neuter event. The idea fit right in with the type of ministry that Gaskins and his congregation are already doing. "The low-income population of Lee County is concentrated in a two-mile radius around our church. So what we have done is launched 'Mission Jonesboro,' and we're trying to reach out and serve the community, and through serving the community to embody Christ's presence, and build relationships that will open doors to share the gospel with people," Gaskins says.

After Gutleben called Owen to float the idea of an event targeting local pet owners, he suggested including Jonesboro Heights; the two congregations have partnered on projects in the past. Owen and Gaskins met, picked a date, picked a location (a grassy, vacant lot owned by Gaskins' church), and went from there.

"We're all aware of the overpopulation of pets, plus, with the state of the economy right now, it's obvious that people are in need of help ... The [HSUS] has a good reputation, so it was a way to reach out to the community with a strong organization, and really do some good," Owen says.

Once the churches signed on, Albourn reached out to Abbey Lindauer, a board member of Carolina Animal Rescue and Adoption (CARA), a rescue group with its own shelter in Sanford. The group offered to contribute \$500 to pay for low-cost spay/neuter vouchers to distribute at the event. The HSUS matched CARA's contribution, so a total of \$1,000 was used to purchase low-cost spay/neuter vouchers from the Spay/Neuter Veterinary Clinic of the Sandhills, a nonprofit practice supported by the Companion Animal Clinic of the Sandhills Foundation, in nearby Vass, N.C.

Albourn also contacted veterinarian Kelli Ferris, an assistant clinical professor at North Carolina State University's College of Veterinary Medicine who also serves as director of the college's community/campus partnership program. She offered to contribute all the necessary veterinary supplies and services, as well as the college's mobile surgery hospital.

A week before the event, Owen used the children's story hour—which takes place during his church's worship service—for dual purposes: to publicize the free shot clinic and spay/neuter effort; and to say a few words about the importance of taking care of companion animals. Fliers were handed out to the congregation, and Owen encouraged people to give them to friends and neighbors who might need some help taking care of their pets.

The day of the event, none of the organizers knew quite what to expect. Had they done enough publicity? How many people would turn out?

"Initially when we planned to do this, we had no idea what our participation was going to be like. It was just something that we were going to try because it was a community in need," Albourn says. But they needn't have worried: Hundreds of people showed up.



A dog gives kisses to Lori Resnick, a volunteer for Carolina Animal Rescue & Adoption, while veterinarian Kelli Ferris and the pet's owner look on at a free shot clinic and spay/neuter awareness event.

of Christ congregation in Sanford, N.C.—thinks it makes perfect sense.

His experience of the human-animal bond as a relationship with sacred underpinnings captures the spirit of an event held last October in Lee County, N.C. Hundreds of people turned out for a free shot clinic and spay/neuter awareness effort jointly hosted by Shallow Well Church and Jonesboro Heights Baptist Church, also in Sanford. The event was coordinated by Kim Albourn, North Carolina state director for The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS); Amanda Arrington, manager of spay/neuter initiatives for The HSUS; and Christine Gutleben, director of the organization's Faith Outreach program.

"It was crazy," says Lindauer. "It was amazing that people waited two and a half hours, with dogs on leashes and cats in carriers, and everybody waited patiently, and was so kind. One woman came with her 12 small-breed dogs in the back of her car."

Two hundred and eighty three pets got rabies vaccines, and more than 200 animals received core vaccinations. (Dogs got shots for distemper, parvo, and canine adenovirus; cats got CVR vaccines to prevent against herpesvirus, calicivirus, and panleukopenia.) All \$1,000 worth of low-cost and no-cost spay/neuter vouchers were distributed, and the pet owners' names were added to the waiting list for surgical procedures at the clinic in Vass. Many of them followed up soon afterward. "In fact, we heard from the spay/neuter clinic that they've already gotten tons of those appointments done," says Arrington, who lives in Raleigh, N.C.

The support of the two Sanford congregations was one key to the overall success. "The churches were fabulous," Lindauer says. They provided activities for children who attended, water and snacks for people and pets alike, and bilingual translators to assist community members who primarily speak Spanish (Lee County has a large Hispanic population). It worked out well for the churches, too. They gave away English- and Spanish-language Bibles, and directors of the children's choirs and members of the mission groups were on hand to meet participants. "I think people made the connection of the two churches being there to serve the community," Gaskins says.

Owen was amazed by how many people expressed their appreciation. "There was one in particular—a lady, and she had her son with her. She came to me, and she said, 'Thank you so much for doing this. We weren't going to be able to afford to get them the shots they needed this year,'" he says. "But what meant the most to me was the child looked at me, and he said, 'Thank you so much,' and just smiled. That made it worth all the hard work." 



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[scoop]

Yes, We Have Some Chihuahuas

Sacramento SPCA takes in more than 150 animals from an overcrowded home

BY JAMES HETTINGER

For a while last summer, the Sacramento SPCA in California appeared to be hosting a Chihuahua convention.

"We did have Chihuahuas parked everywhere," says Rick Johnson, the SPCA's executive director.

The private, nonprofit Sacramento shelter, which typically houses at least 300 animals, took in an additional 158, including 138 dogs (primarily Chihuahuas, but also some larger dogs such as border collie and Great Pyrenees mixes), 12 cats, three rabbits, three rats, and two mice.

Portable wire cages housing multiple dogs were stacked in an open area, says Lesley Kirrene, the organization's public relations director. Runs were filled with larger dogs and groups of Chihuahuas. The dogs essentially took over an entire building. Though the situation was well-managed, Kirrene

says—with staff and volunteers keeping the area clean, and giving the dogs several walks a day—feeding time produced an ear-splitting racket.

Rescuers from The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and Kern County Animal Control had removed the animals in July from substandard conditions at a Chihuahua "rescue" in Tehachapi, Calif., about 320 miles south of the capital city. The SPCA got involved because it was well-positioned to help, with an in-house behaviorist, dog trainers, a knowledgeable staff, dedicated volunteers, and the ability to make room for the newcomers.

The SPCA also has "a phenomenal placement rate for small dogs," Kirrene says. "We can't keep them in the shelter."

The reasons are rooted in geography and culture. Hundreds of miles south in trendy areas of Southern California, Kirrene

explains, residents are infatuated with the "pocket dogs" they've seen carried around by celebrities like Paris Hilton, and some So Cal shelters are overloaded with small dogs and faced with a client base that's saturated with them, making local adoptions difficult, Kirrene says.

But in Sacramento and elsewhere in Northern California, the yards and the dogs tend to be larger, and the population of small dogs hasn't yet hit the saturation point. "Those of us in Northern California think of Southern California as almost a separate



Sacramento SPCA animal care attendant Jeff Knight takes a pair of pooches off a transport vehicle upon their arrival at the SPCA. Knight was one of the key staff members caring for the dogs rescued from Kern County, according to SPCA spokeswoman Lesley Kirrene.

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state," Kirrene says. "They're very different areas population-wise and income-wise and trend- and fad-wise."

The influx after July's rescue posed logistical and staffing challenges. The SPCA has three separate buildings: one for new arrivals, one that serves as a sick bay, and one that houses animals ready for adoption. When the dogs from Kern County arrived, the shelter

moved its sick-bay animals to one side of the dog adoption area, shut that off to the public, and converted the regular sick bay into an area for the new arrivals.

The dogs were generally well-fed and in decent medical shape, though most of the Chihuahuas were older and had horrible dental conditions that required attention, Kirrene recalls. But many of the dogs exhibited fear and poor socialization; they had biting issues and were territorial over their food.

The shelter set up a group of staff and volunteers dedicated to the Kern County dogs. “We tried to keep the same couple of staff people with the dogs at all times, and it was amazing the bond that they formed,” Kirrene says. Dogs who initially wouldn’t let anyone near them ended up energetically licking a staff member’s face, tails wagging. Volunteers who walked and socialized the dogs daily played a huge role in getting them ready for adoption, Kirrene adds. By early December, only one of the Kern County dogs was still waiting for a home.

(Thirty of the animals had to be euthanized because of illness or socialization issues, while 101 had been adopted out by the shelter, and 25 were sent to rescue.)

The SPCA’s efforts produced both sad and happy moments. A poorly socialized female border collie mix was initially frightened of Kirrene but eventually warmed up to her. “She not only got used to me, she became, I think, very, very attached”—with near-tragic results. When Kirrene took her home, the dog bit Kirrene’s son. Back at the shelter in quarantine, the dog would whine and cry



The Sacramento SPCA had wall-to-wall Chihuahuas last summer after taking in 158 animals removed from an overcrowded “rescue” in Southern California. The influx posed staffing and logistical challenges, but SPCA staff and volunteers rose to the occasion and placed a large percentage of the adoptable animals.

when Kirrene walked by, and wound up not getting placed, “She was a very sad case,” Kirrene says.

On a happier note, Erin Long-Scott, a state employee from South Sacramento, adopted Lovie, a frightened-but-sweet, older Chihuahua whose teeth were green and decayed. “When I first got him, they were calling him Dr. Death, because he just looked so bad,” says Long-Scott, who was in the market for a dog who might not otherwise make it out of the shelter.

But Lovie, named for Chicago Bears coach Lovie Smith, faced the equivalent of a fourth and long. When SPCA veterinarian Laurie Siperstein-Cook pulled all but one of Lovie’s rotten teeth, the dog’s jawbone shattered. The veterinary program at the University of California Davis, which collaborates with the SPCA on a number of projects, stepped in to insert a plate connecting Lovie’s chin to the back of his jaw, enabling him to chew.

“Now he’s a happy little dog,” Long-Scott reports.

Johnson notes that the SPCA accepted about 100 dogs following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, but the Kern County case represented the largest number of animals it has taken in at one time. In addition to finding new homes for the Kern County animals, the SPCA gained valuable training for a potential future disaster that could cause a similar influx, Johnson says.

Kirrene says shelter staff members were asking themselves, “Could we suddenly house a large number of animals, and how would we do it? We were able to prove to ourselves in this case that we were able to do it.”

Despite the logistical and staffing challenges, Johnson and Kirrene say the SPCA’s Chihuahua endeavor was a positive, collaborative experience. Staff and volunteers rose to the occasion, the local media spread the word about the animals’ arrival, PetSmart Charities supplied crates, and the HSUS staff proved to be caring and well-organized.

Kirrene’s advice to shelters considering something similar is to formulate a plan now. “You never know when HSUS might come calling, or there might be a natural disaster, or there might be a case in your community that requires an SPCA or a humane society to step in.” 

Partnering Up

The Sacramento SPCA is one of more than 80 shelters in the Emergency Services Placement Partner (ESPP) program, an initiative The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) started in fall 2009 to create a database of quality animal welfare organizations that are ready to step up and help place animals following an emergency rescue.

The HSUS for years has worked with shelters when animals need a place to go following a natural disaster, cruelty case, puppy mill shutdown, or dogfighting bust, explains Inga Fricke, the organization’s director of sheltering initiatives. The ESPP program formalizes those partnerships by requiring shelters to sign up in advance and go through a screening process to make sure the animals will receive proper care.

Participating shelters can generate “a lot of goodwill” as well as community support, Fricke says. “When you take in dogs, particularly from puppy mills, for example, there’s a huge public outpouring of support for those animals, and that usually translates into donations. It translates into a lot more awareness of the shelter and the animals in the shelter. It translates into a lot of adoptions.”

Beyond that, Fricke notes that shelters get “that internal self-satisfaction of knowing that you’ve done something to extend yourself and help the animals.”

The ESPP program is growing in popularity—25 shelters have joined since July—and always looking for new members. Municipal shelters, private shelters, and rescues are eligible and can apply by going to animalsheltering.org/espp or by emailing Catherine Lynch at clynch@humanesociety.org.



Move over, Octomom. You've got nothing on **Biscuit**, a stray cat in foster care in **Fairmont, Minn.**, who gave birth to 11 healthy kittens just before Thanksgiving. It's not a record—the largest litter is believed to be 19 kittens born to a Burmese cat in 1970, 15 of whom survived. But 11 is certainly nothing to sniff at! The **4-year-old**,



SHARON DOROW

shorthaired buff tabby and her spitting-image offspring were cared for by Sharon Dorow, who has fostered about 160 cats and kittens for **Martin County Humane Society** in Fairmont over the past 10 years. Considering that there aren't enough seats at the milk bar for the seven girls and four boys, they seemed to nurse in shifts, according to Dorow. "I went down there early one morning, and ... there were a couple [lying] off to the side," she says. "I don't know if they take numbers!" While Biscuit did the majority of the work herself, Dorow says she lent a hand at times, especially when it came to keeping the kittens clean. "She [would] clean the first six, and then she's, 'I really don't want to do this anymore.'" What mother doesn't think that at some point, usually when the kid hits the teenage years?

Splendor in the grass. The **Dutchess County SPCA** in **Hyde Park, N.Y.**, broke ground in November on a new, state-of-the-art, 15,000-square-foot facility that will include artificial wetlands designed to

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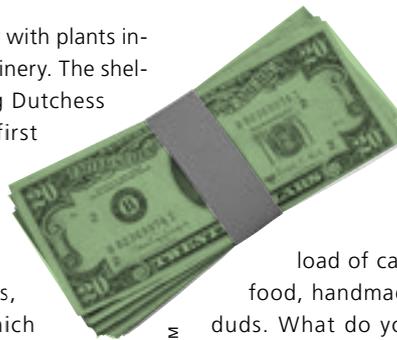
process wastewater naturally with plants instead of chemicals and machinery. The shelter, which has been serving Dutchess County since 1871, is the first in the country to install a wetland for this purpose, replacing its septic system with a large garden of reeds, cattails, bulrushes, and other grasses into which used water will be piped. The grasses then take over, breaking down contaminants and purifying the water, which emerges from the wetlands "pure as Poland Spring," says **executive director Joyce Garrity**. "It's aesthetically pleasing and compatible with the environment." The new building, expected to be completed in 2012, will also include large, bright, communal living areas for cats, indoor exercise areas for dogs, and an education space, which will allow staff to conduct onsite humane education classes for children.

COG-nitive skills. **Fairfax County Animal Shelter's** commitment to humanely controlling feral cat colonies has snagged it an award from the **Metropolitan Council of Governments**, a nonprofit organization of 21 local governments in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. The Animal Services division of the group bestowed its **Humane Education Award** on the



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Fairfax, Va., shelter for its trap-neuter-return (TNR) program and **Helping Community Cats classes**, which train citizens to carry out TNR in managed colonies. Established in October 2008 as part of **Alley Cat Allies' "Every Kitty—Every City" campaign**, the program has trained more than 200 people in TNR, and spayed or neutered more than 800 feral cats in Fairfax County. The program is supported by proceeds from the sale of the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles' Animal Friendly license plates.



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Virtual cats raise real money. OK, so you're a crazy cat lady (or lad). You have a houseful of felines on whom you've already dropped a boatload of cash for super-premium food, handmade toys, and designer duds. What do you do if you have no room for any more furbearers (and you don't want to become a hoarder)? Go virtual, of course! Last November, the **ASPCA** launched **Operation Cats**, a website where visitors could create the animated purr ball of their dreams, be it a lavender longhair with green spots and curly whiskers or a smoke shorthair with orange feet and pink nose. Through the end of December, creators of fake felines could spoil their make-believe babies by using real bucks to buy virtual collars, toys, catnip, even a milk fountain. The money all went to support the ASPCA's spay/neuter programs. By mid-December, more than 3,800 cartoon cats had raised nearly \$7,000 to help reduce euthanasia by preventing the birth of unwanted cats and dogs. Operation Cats was such a hit that the ASPCA says it may make another appearance in 2011.



Thieves make out like bandits. Things are not always all butterflies and rainbows in the world of virtual pets. An Italian woman found that out in October when thieves broke into her ersatz apartment on **Facebook's Pet Society game** and stole all the virtual items, leaving only the resident virtual cat. According to *msnbc.com*, **Paola Letizia** of Palermo, Italy, had spent about \$140 decorating the seven-room faux home and showering the blue flat cat with toys and cute outfits. Italian postal police were investigating the theft; if caught, the robbers could face five years in a very real prison for aggravated entry into her e-mail and Facebook account. Perhaps she should have gotten a virtual dog ... or a life. 



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What's the longest distance someone has traveled to adopt or reclaim an animal from your agency/organization?

That's the question we asked for this issue's Coffee Break, and you responded with tales showing that when people fall in love with an animal—or want to get a family member home—distance is no obstacle.



There was a dog by the name of Titus who was getting really stressed and scared. We were going to see if we could find an alternative place for him. Within one day of him being removed off the adoption floor, a gentleman called from Alaska and asked if we still had him. He flew out the next day, and spent most of the day with him to try to get him to warm up to him. Titus got adopted and is on his way to Alaska as we speak.

—Angela Wheatley, adoption counselor
Southwest Washington Humane Society
Vancouver, Washington

We run a small animal shelter in Picayune, Miss. A family in Juneau, Alaska, wanted a Manx kitten and saw two Manx brothers listed on our website. The husband, Mr. Sullivan, called inquiring about these kittens, and a few days later, he flew down to adopt them. We were amazed that he would come so far, and our local newspaper even did a story on it. He ran into a lot of problems on his trip, too numerous to mention in 150 words, but it turned into quite an ordeal. In spite of all this, he said he has no regrets about coming, and that they are wonderful kittens. He still sends us e-mail and pictures.

—Maria Diamond, president
Pearl River County SPCA
Picayune, Mississippi

You may have heard the story of Jack Daniels, a little black kitten abducted from the San Francisco SPCA last summer. Despite a city-wide search, we thought we'd never know what happened to the little guy. ... When animal care and control picked up a stray on 100th Street in New York City, they had no idea that the cat they found had begun his life in San Francisco, but when they scanned for a microchip registered to the San Francisco SPCA, they picked up the phone to alert us. Welcome home, Jack Daniels! Thanks to our partners at JetBlue Airways and Kimpton Hotels, Jack Daniels made it back to the San Francisco SPCA safe and sound and ready to find a new home. We don't know how he got to New York, who took him from the San Francisco SPCA or any of the details in between, but we are glad he made it back here. Jack Daniels is happily settling into his new digs! His new pal Miles says that he is adjusting nicely and currently trying to figure out which he likes better: belly or back rubs! He's off to a good start with the sweet life.

—Laura Gretch, community outreach
specialist
San Francisco SPCA
San Francisco, California

Thirteen hundred kilometers! [Approximately 808 miles.] A woman returning from a visit with her parents in Halifax, Nova Scotia, found a dog wearing a collar and tags on the side of the road. She didn't know what to do, so she brought the dog to us in Ottawa, Ontario, after feeding it nothing but fast-food chicken for two days. The owners were contacted, and arrangements were made to fly the dog home the next day. For fun we sewed a bandana with our logo for the 1-year-old German shepherd, which he wore on the plane ride home.

—Michelle Tribe, communications coordinator
Ottawa Humane Society
Ottawa, Ontario

A gentleman in Vancouver, British Columbia, saw online a special-needs, three-legged Pomeranian that we had in our rescue, and fell in love. His three-legged Pomeranian had recently passed, and he just knew that our dog was meant for him. After applying and being approved to adopt her, he had a friend from L.A. fly to Indiana to pick her up for him, and then he had to fly to L.A. that weekend for business, and he picked her up in L.A. and took her back to Vancouver! Where they are living happily ever after!

—Dawn Moore, founder and president
Moore Love Rescue
Greensburg, Indiana

While it's only about seven hours by car, we had a family 400 miles away in Toronto, Canada, travel to our shelter near Albany, N.Y., to adopt an adorable terrier mix. But in order to get here in time to adopt Scruffy before anyone else, they chartered a private plane to come get him! After a short cab ride, they arrived at the shelter, and it was love at first sight. Scruffy enjoyed his experience on a plane, settling down to nap at the feet of his new family. They say every boy needs a dog—we think every dog needs a boy (or a girl). Scruffy is now best of friends with the family's son, thanks to a young couple who knew that he was special enough to travel to another country, by air and by land, to find his "forever" home.

—Melissa Tata, animal welfare manager
Animal Protective Foundation
Scotia, New York

We received a lost report back in August for an orange, medium-haired neutered cat named Ike whose family had been visiting in Gaithersburg, Md. The family routinely travelled in an RV, and the cat somehow escaped. In mid-November, a cat matching the description of the lost kitty was brought in as a stray to our shelter. While checking our lost reports, our lost-and-found coordinator felt that she had found a match. She contacted the family, who had just returned to their home in Illinois. They looked at Ike's photo on our website, and promptly turned around and drove back to Rockville, Md., to pick up their beloved cat, Ike. When Ike was reunited with his human mother, he gave her a big hug. There was not a dry eye in the shelter lobby.

—Kathy Dillon, operations and medical programs manager
Montgomery County Humane Society
Rockville, Maryland

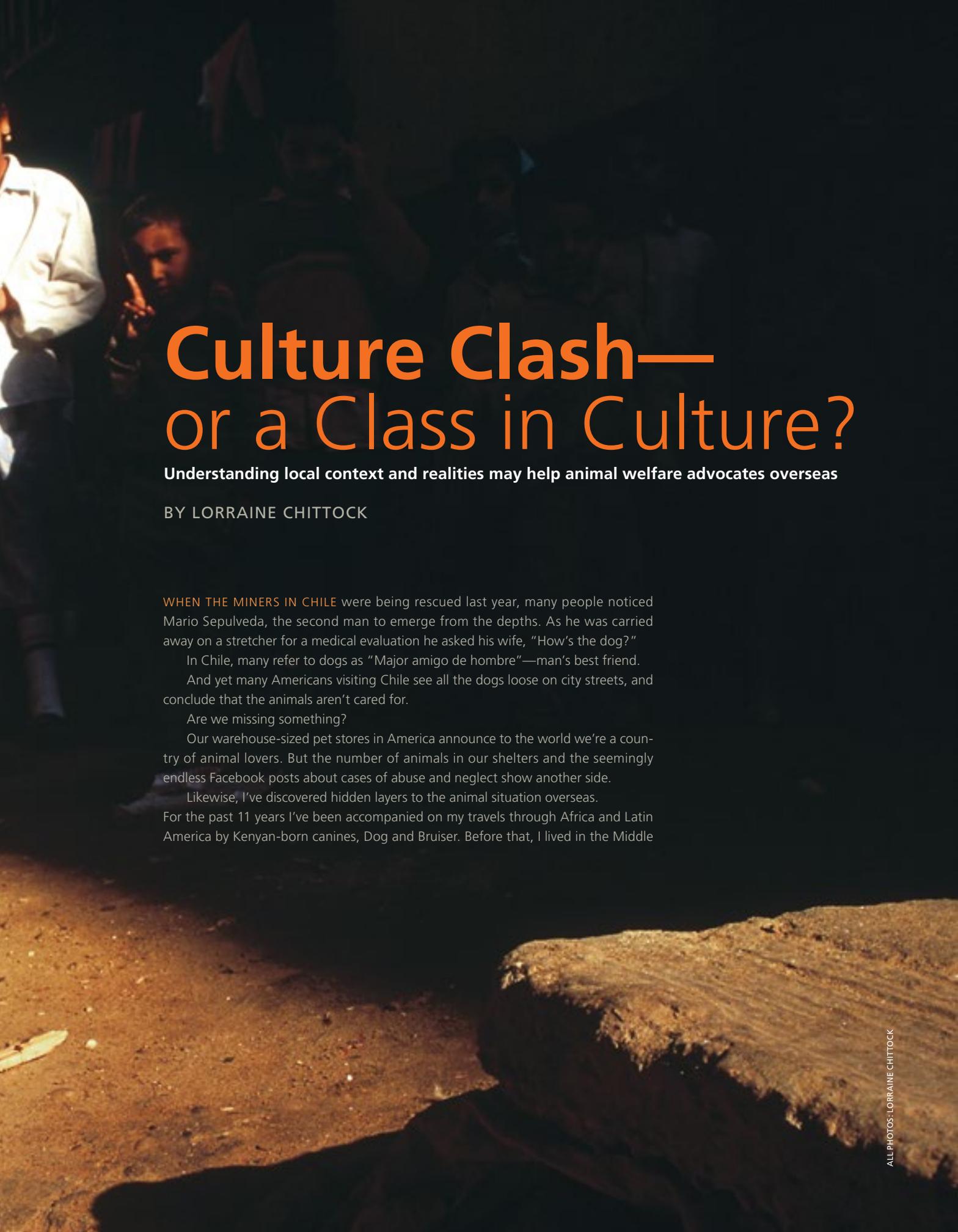
We had a charming pair of Chinese Crested sisters up for adoption. Their elderly owner had gone into a nursing home and was devastated to give his girls up. We wanted very badly for them to be able to stay together, [because they had] already lost someone they loved dearly. We turned down many people who wanted to adopt just one or the other, but finally, the perfect couple from Miami contacted us about adopting both. Since the girls were in Pennsylvania, we wondered how they planned to get them. They flew to Pennsylvania, rented a car, and drove all the way back to Miami with their new little family members in the back seat. We get regular updates of the girls in their bikinis enjoying life from their new home overlooking the beach.

—Sue Hankard, director
Bare Paws Rescue
Gilford, New Hampshire

Congratulations to Sue Hankard, whose submission was selected in a random drawing from those published in this issue. Her organization, Bare Paws Rescue in Gilford, N.H., will receive a free coffee break: a \$50 gift certificate to a local coffee shop. "Bone" *à*ppétit!

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.





Culture Clash— or a Class in Culture?

Understanding local context and realities may help animal welfare advocates overseas

BY LORRAINE CHITTOCK

WHEN THE MINERS IN CHILE were being rescued last year, many people noticed Mario Sepulveda, the second man to emerge from the depths. As he was carried away on a stretcher for a medical evaluation he asked his wife, “How’s the dog?”

In Chile, many refer to dogs as “Major amigo de hombre”—man’s best friend.

And yet many Americans visiting Chile see all the dogs loose on city streets, and conclude that the animals aren’t cared for.

Are we missing something?

Our warehouse-sized pet stores in America announce to the world we’re a country of animal lovers. But the number of animals in our shelters and the seemingly endless Facebook posts about cases of abuse and neglect show another side.

Likewise, I’ve discovered hidden layers to the animal situation overseas.

For the past 11 years I’ve been accompanied on my travels through Africa and Latin America by Kenyan-born canines, Dog and Bruiser. Before that, I lived in the Middle

East for seven years. Traveling as a “foreigner” with two community-raised dogs in tow brought animal lovers out of the woodwork. People who might never speak to their friends about their love for critters felt free to speak to me.

When Dog and I took a trip north to an area around Lake Turkana in Kenya to stay with a nomadic tribe called the Gabra, I noticed a woman who was never apart from her four dogs. Waatu had folds of fabric flowing over her fertility-goddess hips. I inquired about her family and health, as is Gabra custom, before I felt it appropriate to ask about her dogs.

“Many of the dogs here in Miakona guard the houses, but your dogs are guarding you. Why?” I asked through my Gabra translator, Saless.

“They know I care for them,” Waatu replied, adjusting her bright tobe.

As our lives in the West have become more hectic, could it be that we have forgotten these age-old animal training methods and lost some basic intuitive connections with animals?

“Is that why your dogs come to work with you? To guard you?”

“They get lonely without me. And I get lonely without them.”

I explained that where I come from it’s normal for people to touch and stroke their dogs. “Have you ever seen this in your village?”

“No, never. But me, I touch my dogs. I think it just depends on how people think upstairs.”

As a child who kept my love for animals hidden, I understood this division between public and private affection. Not wanting to be the subject of shaming, I knew better as a child than to cuddle Toby, our white cat, in public. Though as a girl I was less worried about being called a “sissy,” I was still very conscious that more-than-casual displays of affection toward Toby would be considered inappropriate. While I lavished affection on Toby behind closed doors, to my friends she was “just” a cat. Cuddling, I deduced from observing those around me, was meant for dolls or human babies. I was raised when Disney—and other cultural forces—were only just beginning to make an impression on how Americans viewed our relationships with animals. Warehouse-size stores selling pet paraphernalia weren’t even a dream, and many Americans considered vet care a luxury.

In this village of Maikona, there wasn’t even electricity.

Waatu and I wandered outside, and a few minutes later while she was breast-feeding her youngest child, one of her

dogs strayed close. She threw a rock in its direction, which made me wonder if she’d merely said what she thought I wanted to hear.

A few minutes after she finished nursing, she swatted her oldest daughter with the end of a cane, which made me realize perspective was in order. The daughter did something Waatu didn’t like. Swat! The dog did something she didn’t like. Ping! Both dog and daughter slunk away. Though it’s easy for us to preach this isn’t the way to raise your child or teach your dog, it worked for Waatu.

In other cultures, there’s less of a division between the indoor and outdoor worlds. In tropical locations without air conditioning, restaurants don’t have doors and windows, so dogs can wander in and out. Raised in this open-air environment, people understand that offering one morsel of food to one dog results in a quickly gathered pack of 20 gaping mouths who will never voluntarily leave your side.

“What do you do about rabies?” I asked Waatu.

“If we have a case of rabies, all the dogs in the village have to be killed.”

I was stunned—but on the continents of Africa and Asia, rabies is still common and means certain death. The nearest hospital for Waatu was a five-hour drive away on a very rocky track. Usually less than one vehicle a day passed through Maikona.

“And now I have a question for you,” Waatu said. “What can I do about *dudus*, the insects that crawl on my dogs and make them scratch?”

How do I reply? That the only thing that really works costs half the month’s profits from her store where she sells basic supplies like soap and sugar? There isn’t even toilet paper in this village. I tell her there is a tree called eucalyptus, and leaves placed where the dogs sleep will help. But there are no eucalyptus trees in Miakona. It’s obvious she’s disappointed.

I wondered what I would do if Dog and I lived here, and her fleas got out of hand. I knew locals used some herbal remedies for their dogs. I’d met a family earlier who’d strung some medicinal herbs around a dog’s neck to make her better. Did it work? I didn’t know. But the owners cared enough to try.

While we chatted, Waatu’s brother, Shamou Canchor, entered. Tall and good-looking, with a lean, muscular body, his smile flashed brightly. He listened to his sister, nodding his head in acknowledgment.

“I lost my dog once,” he interrupted. “I was so upset. What makes my home is my dog. That dog is the most important part of my life.”

The translator’s jaw dropped open. Not being a dog lover, or coming from a family who cared for dogs, he’d never heard such a thing. I smiled.

I asked to take a picture of Canchor with his dog. While walking to his hut where his dog was guarding, I got my camera ready. Gourage was waiting for Shamou near the



A Chilean man, who lost two dogs during the eruption of Mount Chaiten in 2008, carries 4-month-old Chupeti on an ash-filled harbor. In a situation reminiscent of New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, the authority known as the *Municipalidad* ordered residents to evacuate—without their pets. Almost immediately, the first rescue and evacuation of animals in Chile began. The man also cares for Latay and Morocho, two dogs whose owners never returned.

hut, and asked to be petted by wrapping himself excitedly around the tall man's legs. Shamou looked down at his black dog fondly, but did not touch the animal. The most important part of his life? It seemed unlikely.

But then Canchor began telling me a story about Gourage.

"Six months ago in January, the hottest time of the year, we were making arrangements for our wedding. We had been on the move, searching for better grazing for our animals. With all the wedding preparations, everything was chaotic. Somehow, I did not notice Gourage was missing. I looked everywhere. Without him, what would I do? I had to find him. The morning after my wedding I gave my new wife instructions on what to feed Gourage if he came back," he said, and pointed to a multitude of food containers hanging from leather cords along the wall. All the vessels are hand-woven and covered with goat fat to prevent any liquid from seeping out.

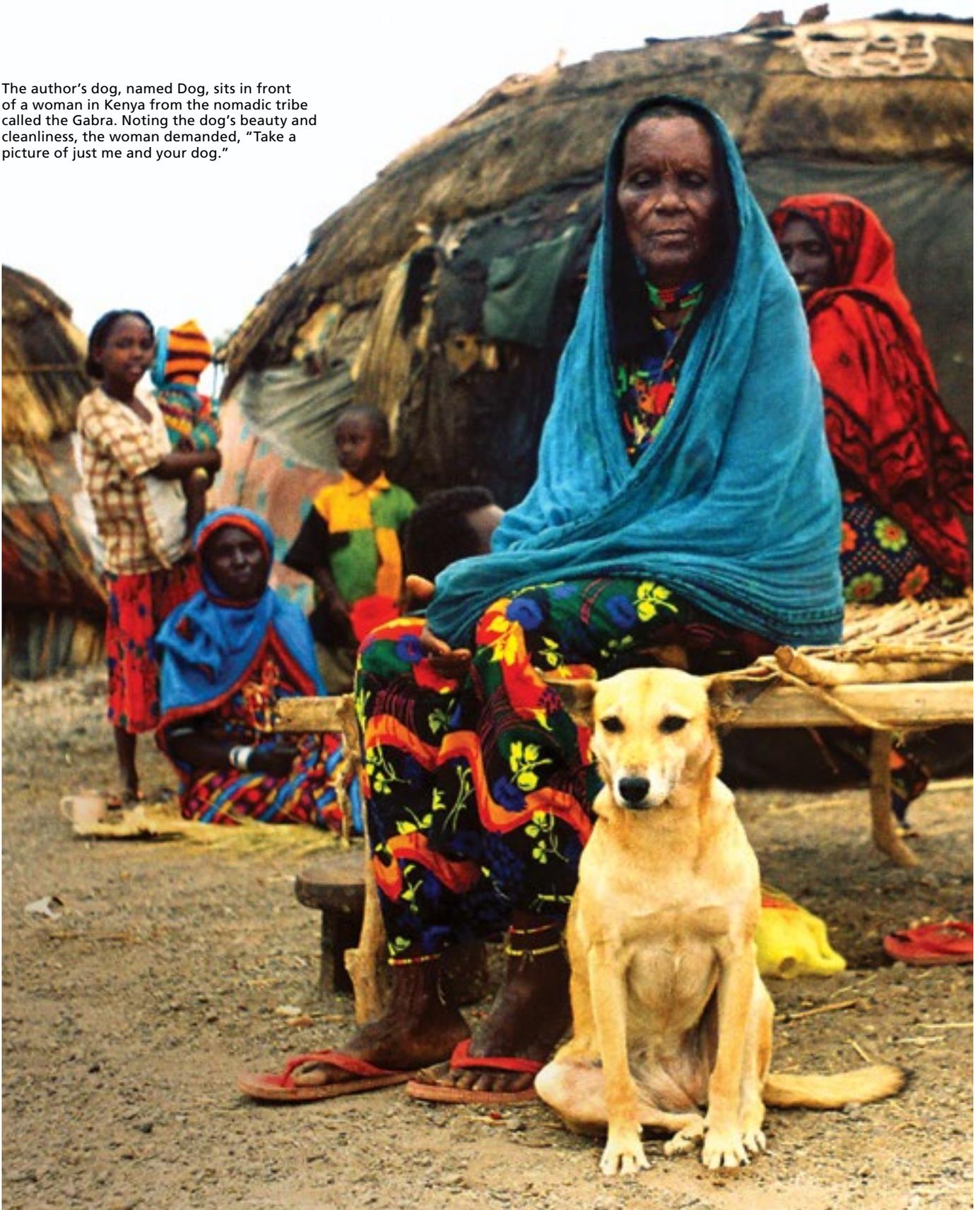
"I began walking in the direction where we had last camped. After two days I met a man. He had seen Gourage, and somehow knew the dog belonged to someone who loved him. The man had taken him in. I was so happy to find Gourage! But he was very, very weak. He had walked for miles without food or water during the hottest time of the year. I do not know what I would have done if he had died. My life would not be worth living ..."

While traveling in Latin America, I continued to be perplexed when seeing dogs greeted unenthusiastically by their people—until I viewed a few revealing and private moments. Just after a typical noncommittal exchange, one man walked inside his home. Just before the gate closed, he reached down to pet his dog. Once attuned to this, I kept my eyes open. Repeat performances followed between other people and their animals. The conflict between public and private displays of affection was not isolated to my American childhood.

I also commonly saw dogs walking to heel without leashes—even on busy streets. Some modern training methods teach us to keep an aloof attitude when returning home to ensure the dog owner is the pack leader. As our lives in the West have become more hectic, could it be that we have forgotten these age-old animal training methods and lost some basic intuitive connections with animals?

Surrounded by strays from childhood to old age, people in some other cultures develop a high tolerance for mutts who pee, poop, carouse, and mate in public. As I ordered food from a street stall in Bolivia, I was the only one who seemed to notice two dogs bumping into people as they mated enthusiastically. Usually the most attention this warrants is someone waving their hands to shoo dogs away. Loose canines are interwoven into the fabric of Asian, African, and Latin societies in a way they're not in America.

The author's dog, named Dog, sits in front of a woman in Kenya from the nomadic tribe called the Gabra. Noting the dog's beauty and cleanliness, the woman demanded, "Take a picture of just me and your dog."





A Kuna woman enjoys a moment on the waterfront with her beloved dog Estrella, or Star, on one of the San Blas Islands in the Caribbean.

And yet a comment I've repeatedly heard from tourists is: "All these loose dogs. No one cares!"

Is that true? Do cultures that have loose dogs equate with an uncaring populace? Or could it just mean that people are involved in their own lives, just as many Americans are so involved with work that they're not involved in animal rescue, even though they have pets?

In America, people take in one or two animals, rarely more. (Perhaps the readers of this magazine are an exception to the rule!) But in Chile, where I now live, it's not uncommon to see animal lovers taking in five to 10 animals, knowing that city officials might eliminate excess animals from the streets with a "cleanup" campaign, culling by poison or other methods. Audiences often gasp when I mention this during speaking engagements. Barring the fact that poison is an inhumane method of euthanasia, is this public killing perhaps more honest than our way: killing animals behind doors in shelters, privately, so that our communities rarely have to confront the issue? In other countries, the public cannot pretend not to know what happens to loose dogs. Ask average Americans about the animal homelessness issue: Many won't know our euthanasia numbers are still in the millions.

Stories abound of well-meaning tourists or aid workers "saving" dogs from the street, without realizing the animal might already have a home. Unlike canines in the Northern Hemisphere who live within strict property lines, many foreign dogs are allowed to come and go at will. "Gringos" often consider this irresponsible ownership. Might a dog's opinion differ? Having a life outside the human family was



"My dogs get lonely without me," says Waatu, a Gabra woman in Northern Kenya who is never apart from her four dogs. "And I get lonely without them."

how American dogs from a bygone era once lived. Family hounds socialized freely with other neighborhood mutts during the day, returning home to collect scraps from the table in exchange for guard duties.

Guarding is a role dogs know well. In many countries, you can't call 911, and police offer minimal protection. Instead, people rely on dogs. In America, when an aggressive dog fails a temperament test, he could be euthanized. In other countries, an overly aggressive dog would be rewarded. The fear of dogs we find so prevalent in other societies also dates back to a not-so-distant past when dogs served a useful but morbid scavenger role by eating dead bodies, in addition to spreading diseases and carrying rabies. While we perceive other cultures' fear of dogs as excessive, it makes sense in context.

As we work toward improved conditions for animals all over the globe, we need to make sure that we don't have on cultural "blindness." There are reasons that people behave in the ways they do, and the more we understand those reasons, the more we can do to identify and solve genuine animal welfare problems.

In Chile, pet cemeteries abound. One just south of Iquique lies at the foot of the Atacama mountains and overlooks the Pacific Ocean. Thousands of beloved pets have been buried there since 2004, some with elaborate tombstones, others very simple. One reads, "To the great friend Polo, who believed he was a child. You gave us much happiness and sorrow. We'll always love you." The bond between people and animals can never be broken. Love of animals is not a purely Western value; it is universal. **AS**

After twelve years living in Africa and the Middle East as a writer and photographer, Lorraine Chittock returned to America with two Kenyan street dogs. In 2006 the pack began exploring South America to produce Los Mutts — Latin American Dogs. They currently live in Chile. Chittock's books, including the recently released On a Mission from Dog, can be found at lorrainechittock.com.



Through Washington Humane Society's Dog Tags program, director of animal behavior and training Kevin Simpson and other shelter staff help veterans prepare shelter dogs for new homes.



Someone to Watch Over Me

At military and veterans' hospitals around the country, dogs are increasingly part of the cure

BY CARRIE ALLAN

Sleep—like air and water—is something people rarely think about until they're unable to get any. Then, abruptly, sleep becomes a grail, its absence anguishing, affecting all elements of an insomniac's life. Lack of sleep impairs the brain's ability to learn, to grow, to process thoughts and emotions. And when those emotions are already in turmoil, a human being can experience a perfect storm of trouble.

That storm hit Christopher Hill hard. The Marine staff sergeant had a raft of reasons for the insomnia that began after his first deployment to Iraq in 2003. He'd survived two more tours, all in heavily contested Fallujah, when during his fourth tour of duty in April 2004, his camp was subjected to an insurgent attack. A rocket-propelled grenade exploded nearby, killing four people. Hill was thrown into the air and landed on his back on a concrete barrier.

After the initial shock, he thought he was fine. "I figured I was good to go, no bleeding from the ears, no broken bones. I was sore, but I'd gotten kicked up in the air like Charlie Brown, so I figured I was gonna be sore," he says. But back at Camp Pendleton in California, the longtime bodybuilder was in the gym doing bench presses one day, and when he racked the weights and tried to get off the bench, he couldn't move.

Tests revealed a spinal cord injury, and Hill, who's now retired from the service, has been living with constant back and leg pain. Diagnosed with severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), he was angry all the time and couldn't sleep—"I was doing a three-days awake, one-day-crash

veterans and dogs

sort of regimen”—and he’d holed up at home, not wanting to see anyone, lack of sleep feeding his anger and rage fueling his lack of sleep. “I was basically a walking injury.”

Hill was in and out of treatment centers, but none of them seemed to help. A four-month stint at the National Center for PTSD in Palo Alto, Calif., helped for a while, but a few months after Hill left the hospital, he says, he was miserable again. The Marine Corps sent him back to the center.

Hill was not optimistic, “really not wanting to be there, you know, thinking that I’ve failed the first time around and so this is gonna be a waste of time,” he says. But he noticed that the environment at the center seemed a little different on his second visit. And some of the men at his group sessions seemed different, too.

“When a guy has PTSD, he has this look,” Hill says. But in registering each face around him, he saw some anomalies: “It’s sort of scowl, scowl, scowl ... no scowl. Scowl, scowl, scowl ... no scowl. “I’m like, OK, what’s going on with the guys who really look like they don’t need to be here?”

Hill soon realized what the happier-looking patients had in common: They were the ones with dogs by their side.

A Force Under Strain

Since the beginning of the war in Afghanistan in 2001, the U.S. has asked a great deal of its armed services. As the later war in Iraq dragged on, recruitment rates dwindled—and lower enlistments have forced troops already serving to bear a greater burden. In 2006, a report from the National Security Advisory Group noted that nearly all of the available combat units in the Army, Army National Guard, and Marine Corps had been used in current operations; many Army combat brigades were on their second or third tours of duty.

Those who live through the war may come home wounded, physically or emotionally, and many return wired for a different kind of existence where real and terrifying danger lurks around every corner. But back in civilian life, the very tools a soldier has come to rely on to survive—aggression, hyper-vigilance, willingness to use lethal force—may become a handicap, a way of being that is no longer viable and may, in fact, be harmful to the veteran and his loved ones.

For those troubled veterans who don’t get the right treatment, isolation, frustration, and anxiety can become the norm. A 2009 study found that close to 40



At a Nevada pet supply and grooming store where Christopher Hill buys treats for Verde, the service dog demonstrates his money-handling skills.

percent of the Iraq and Afghanistan veterans treated at American health centers during the previous six years were diagnosed with PTSD, depression, or other mental health issues. A 2010 report noted that 14 percent of Army personnel were on a prescribed painkiller like morphine or oxycodone.

Some traumatized soldiers are slow to seek help, and the consequences can be serious. A smattering of veterans returning from the wars have been charged with crimes including domestic violence and murder—tragedies that, experts have suggested, might have been prevented if those involved had received counseling. Suicide rates have been rising, particularly in the Army and Marine Corps; in 2009, more than 300 service members killed themselves.

The path toward mental health can be a long one. “What’s difficult about engaging men and women with PTSD for treatment is they’re inherently avoidant,” says Michael Jaffe, an independent psychiatrist who’s worked with veterans since his residency at Stanford. He now consults with Paws for Purple Hearts, the group whose dogs Hill first encountered at the Palo Alto center. “It’s very traumatic to talk about; it’s very traumatic to be around people who want to help you with it. ... How do you help something you don’t know someone has? How do you help with something they don’t want to talk about?”

Treatment of PTSD typically involves a combination of medication and psychotherapy. But some doctors and therapists are discovering that for certain kinds of pain, the best medicine isn’t morphine. It’s canine.

Dogs as a Drug

“It is like somebody’s on some very powerful medication,” says Rick Yount, who founded Paws for Purple Hearts as a program of Bergin University of Canine Studies and has watched dogs plow right through the social walls put up by PTSD sufferers.

Yount recalls an angry Marine at the center in Palo Alto—“I think it was 13 different IEDs he’d been hit by”—sitting in a corner and not participating. One of the program’s golden retrievers walked up and nudged the Marine’s leg, to no avail: The man turned away. “And the dog walked around to the other side, like ‘How about this side?’ And the guy kept trying to discourage any more interactions. ... And the dog finally got up on his lap,” Yount recalls, laughing. “And this guy smiled; this Marine cracked a smile.”

Dogs may lack the faculty of speech, opposable thumbs, and an understanding of human preferences regarding toilet habits. But they often seem to exceed the capacity of humans to withhold judgment—and to forgive.

“Can you imagine if you went up to this Marine and tried to shake his hand and he kind of shook his head and didn’t acknowledge you—would you try the other hand?” Yount says. “Would you give him a peck on his cheek?”



DAVID PAUL MORRIS

The greatest benefit of Venuto’s companionship “is the bond and what he does for me emotionally,” says veteran Bill Smith, “because I’m able to handle things better with my family.”

veterans and dogs

To describe dogs as walking prescriptions may seem fanciful to some. But studies have repeatedly shown that the human-animal bond is more than sentimental whimsy. Recently, much research has centered on a hormone called oxytocin, a neurotransmitter that helps female mammals give birth and nurse their young; it's now being examined for its role in social bonding, empathy, and anxiety reduction.

Several studies have indicated that friendly contact between humans and animals elevates the flow of oxytocin—one 2008 study in Japan showed that mere eye contact between dogs and owners could inspire an increase. Those limpid “puppy dog eyes,” it seems, don't just help a dog wheedle more treats; they actually make people feel better and more open to affection and trust.

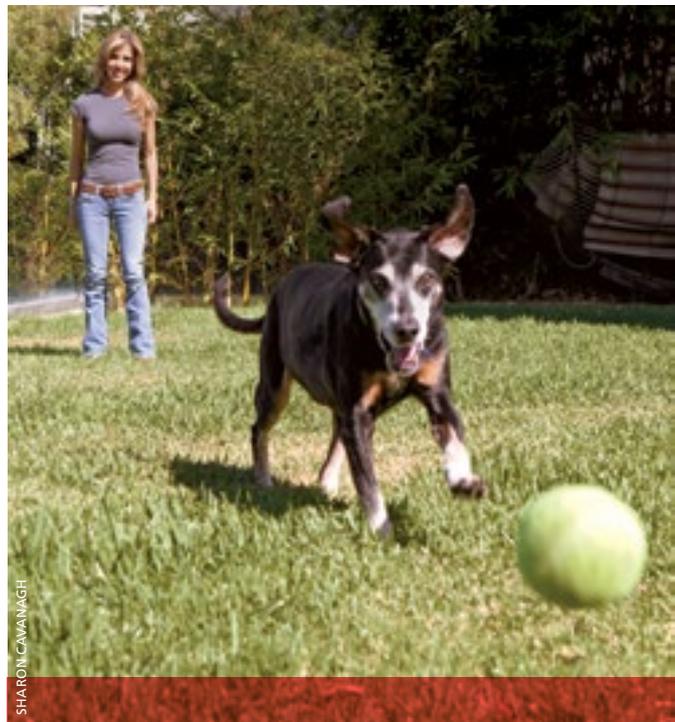
Dogs have proven their therapeutic value even to some who aren't wild about them “Sorry,” says Lt. Col. Matthew St. Laurent, half-amused, half-defiant in his apology for not adoring the canine species. But although he doesn't idolize dogs, the assistant chief of occupational therapy at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., is a believer in the difference they can make. “I'm a therapist,” he says, “and I'm open to any way to help our patients get better.”

It's dogs' responsiveness, St. Laurent says, that makes them good partners in healing psychological wounds. “We have patients that are depressed, we have patients that are irritated or angry, or they may have disfigurement or other major problems. But the dog doesn't care, and the dog shows affection, and the dog listens to them.”

Canine Comrades

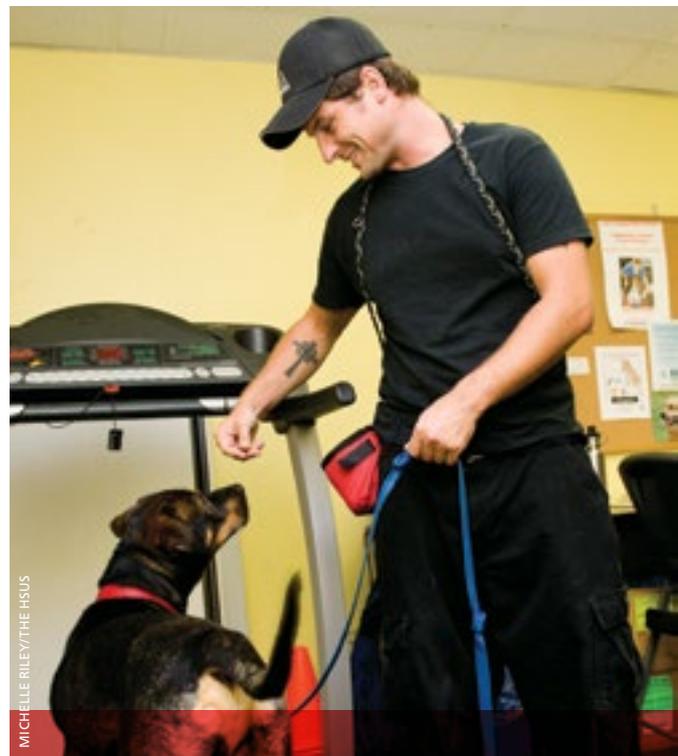
Dogs are now regular visitors at military and veterans' hospitals around the country, St. Laurent says. Some are even accompanying combat stress control teams to Iraq and Afghanistan. At Walter Reed, dogs play multiple roles, sometimes visiting with soldiers and their families, sometimes accompanying a veteran who's learning to walk with a prosthetic limb. The center also hosts the second location of the Paws for Purple Hearts program, and provides a third form of canine interaction: Soldiers in the occupational therapy program can opt to study dog behavior through the Washington Humane Society's Dog Tags program, helping rambunctious shelter dogs develop manners that will make it easier for them to find homes.

Dogs have a calming effect, says St. Laurent. Walter Reed can be a stressful place—and not just due to the grievous injuries patients have suffered. Family members and patients may be seeing each other for the first time in many months, says St. Laurent, and emotions can run high. “We have broken people, patients that are dealing with what's going on in their heads from their war experience,” he says. “And then all of a sudden, you have a dog running around the formation. It kind of normalizes the environment.”



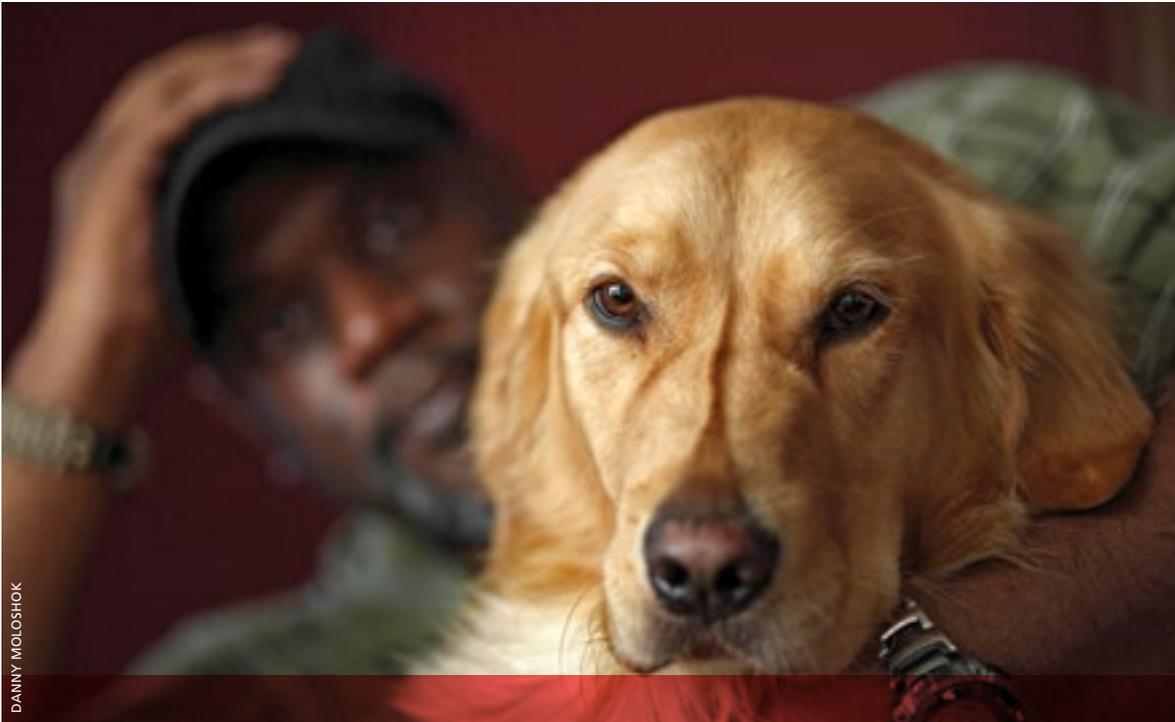
SHARON CAVANAGH

“We have millions of shelter dogs dying to be in service,” says dog trainer Tamar Geller, whose Operation Heroes & Hounds teaches wounded and traumatized vets the skills to act as trainers for homeless dogs.



MICHELLE RILEY/THE HSUS

Veteran Brian Moody doesn't have a pet, but he's happy helping the Washington Humane Society train its dogs. “In a way,” he says, “all the dogs at the shelter are temporarily mine till they can be adopted into a good home.”



DANNY MOLOSHOK

"I just mentally picked up that somebody's watching my back," says Hill of Verde's role in his healing.

Specialist Leif Meisinger, who has memory problems due to the traumatic brain injury he suffered from an IED blast in Iraq, came back to the States attuned to people's movements, alert to any facial expressions that might indicate hostile intent. In public spaces, he was jumpy, watching strangers' hands for weapons and studying rooftops for the presence of snipers. He started staying at home, drinking too much, avoiding the outside world.

That began to change when he visited the booth of Pets for Vets at a Veterans Day function. Founded by Clarissa Black, the organization places shelter animals in homes with veterans.

Meisinger was interested, but he had a special request stemming from his PTSD-related anxieties. "He really wanted a dog, but he was afraid that having the hair around the house was going to exacerbate his issues," says Black.

That might have stopped the conversation, but Black combed area shelters and eventually found Spyder, a Mexican hairless. The dog has become a major part of Meisinger's life, forcing him out of the house and into a healthier routine. And the dog seems to sense when Meisinger is feeling low. "He comes running up and he's just playing and pushing on me ..." Meisinger says. "You can't do anything but start playing. ... I don't even realize it till I'm already out of it; it's like I forgot I was in that bad place."

Like other vets, Meisinger has noticed that having an animal has helped him relate to his family, especially his 8-year-old son. When he returned from combat, the

boy found him a little scary. "I was very irritated and very militant," he says. The dog has given them something to bond over; they play together with Spyder, and Meisinger's learning to be softer. "He's brought me and my son together, which to me is probably the greatest thing that's happened."

Beyond the Bond

For some veterans, though, the mere presence of a dog is only the beginning.

"Companionship is not enough," says Tamar Geller, a dog trainer and former Israeli Army special forces officer whose Operation Heroes & Hounds program pairs wounded veterans with shelter dogs in need of training. "If we don't get them out of their own selves and make them do things with the dogs, they're just going to be in bed all day."

Geller says that training dogs using positive, humane methods teaches veterans skills that will be helpful in civilian life. Like many people, dogs don't respond well to macho, military-style communication, so if trainers try to use that approach, Geller says, "the dog is like, 'Talk to the paw.' ... When they do it my way, when they're playful and softer, the dog is like, 'Oh, I want to listen to you.' "

Learning to be soft and to *sound* soft is a challenge. Affecting an emotionally cheery tone is not something that comes naturally to anyone suffering from PTSD—and Strategic Use of a Baby Voice is not a lesson covered in boot camp.

The irony was not lost on Christopher Hill, who chuckles at the recollection of his initial work as a trainer with Paws for Purple Hearts. "You have a guy who's been in the Marine

Corps 20 years, who's barking orders at guys for 20 years, and all of a sudden I have to sound like Richard Simmons to get this dog to do the simplest things," says Hill.

Luckily, the dogs train the trainers on what works best. "I'm coming across with this bass voice, and the dog's like, 'OK, he's not really happy with me,' so he won't respond. But you come with the joy and the little squeaky voice, and he loves it," says Hill. "So being a Marine, you do what you have to do to make it work, so—Richard Simmons, here we come."

Helping train dogs to provide relief can itself be a therapeutic distraction for PTSD sufferers. "It gives them a sense of purpose to get outside themselves, and a calling that's greater than their disease," says Jaffe.

Many veterans struggle to strike the right tone. "The only way I can get a Marine who's emotionally numb with PTSD to sound like that is to tell them they have to do it to help a fellow Marine," says Yount.

That incentive was deeply meaningful to Hill. "I can't fight on the front lines anymore ..." he says. "So what can I do to stay in the fight? I can actually help guys who are coming back."

The dogs who complete the training are placed as service animals, becoming companions to struggling veterans. Bill Smith—who served in a forward army surveillance unit in Korea in the late '70s and has been in a wheelchair since 1995 due to a misdiagnosed spinal injury—calls himself "dog-blessed." His service dog Venuto, a "24-karat golden retriever" trained by Paws for Purple Hearts, can pick up a quarter or a credit card; turn a light on and off; and open a door for Smith or tow him along in his wheelchair if his arms and shoulders grow too tired. But Smith, who also has PTSD, is most grateful for the dog's emotional help.

Recently at a Best Buy, he started experiencing a panic attack in the checkout line. "It feels like everything just sort of stands still and you separate from everything around you," says Smith. "... And Venuto, he just comes right up and pushes really close into me. And I just put my arm around him and start petting him, and I knead his skin with my thumb and my index fingers. ... And I get a grip, and I come back down from wherever that was."

Helping train dogs to provide that relief can itself be a therapeutic distraction for PTSD sufferers. "It gives them a sense of purpose to get outside themselves, and a calling that's greater than their disease," says Jaffe.

Analysts often use exposure therapy, in which a patient faces the object or condition he fears, learning

that it can be survived. For those suffering from PTSD, crowded public spaces can be a nightmare, a potential trigger for their worst memories from their time in combat. But service dog training includes acclimating the animals to crowds and noise, so sometimes veterans have to take the dogs to a ballgame or a grocery store, where people are bound to speak to the person at the end of the leash. To the dogs, it's an introduction to the human sphere; to the trainers, it's a reintroduction to the noisy, chaotic, normal world—one done in the name of helping the dog, a mission that diverts their focus from their own anxiety.

"The dogs need to learn the world's a fun place, a nice place, a nonthreatening place. And that way they don't get defensive and attack someone in a supermarket or something," Jaffe says. "The guys need to learn that too."

A Way to Stay in the Fight

Seeing the dogs learn helps instill a sense of self-worth in the trainers, many of whom are struggling to cope with new limitations, with disfigurement or scarring—with a sense that they're different from the people they once were. Geller recalls a veteran who had survived a sniper bullet in the face telling her that he was "a useless, broken piece of machinery."

It's that kind of anguish that she wants to help fix. For all its potential peril, Geller says, life in the military provides things often missing in the "normal" world: camaraderie and a focus on specific goals. Training dogs supplies these positive elements in a civilian context, making reintegration easier.

Retired specialist Brian Moody says he's seen the mentality of fellow veterans change as they work with dogs in the Washington Humane Society's Dog Tags program. Soldiers who've had amputations, for example, learn they can still be successful at the work. And no matter how bad Moody himself feels, the chance to bring a timid dog out of her shell or teach her something new provides a sense of accomplishment.

Yount, Geller, and others would like to see the canine assistance programs for veterans expanded. Dogs' capacity to help has not been fully explored, and Yount regularly encounters the catch-22 of scientific evidence: "It's hard to get funding for a program that doesn't have a lot of scientific research behind it, but it's hard to get research without having a program where it can be conducted."

Canine programs may soon get more scientific support: In May, the House passed H.R. 3885, a bill directing the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to conduct a pilot program that would examine the effectiveness of treating veterans suffering from PTSD by letting them help train service dogs for their disabled comrades. (Currently, the bill contains language that would exclude dogs who are not specifically bred for the work—including shelter

dogs—and The HSUS’s Government Affairs staff is working with Geller to get that element changed.) More information may come from research underway at Brooke Army Medical Center in Texas, where the staffers in the occupational therapy program are examining the effects of animal-assisted therapy on soldiers’ moods and transitions to civilian life.

But nobody needs to show Christopher Hill the data; he has his own. “The pharmaceutical companies don’t want to hear from me,” says Hill, who—like many of the service members who’ve worked with animals—has been able to reduce his medications and wean himself off several of them after working as a trainer and then getting his own service dog, Verde. “They would be out of business if these programs were expanded.”

For Hill, participating in the dog training program marked a fundamental shift in his long recovery process.

Even at the National Center for PTSD—a place where sleep disorders are a dime a dozen—Hill’s ongoing insomnia was legendary at the nurses’ station. Every morning brought the same accounting as they recorded the sleep habits of their patients: *Patient X slept through the night. Patient Y slept through the night. Patient Z slept through the night. Christopher did not sleep.*

In combat, Hill says, “having somebody by your side with a weapon who’s watching your back in a really stressful situation is a great comfort. Well, when you leave that environment, that person is no longer there. You’re on your own. ... It’s like you can’t sleep because you [feel like you] have to be up standing your post. And you can’t sleep on your post; that’s endangering everybody’s lives.”

It’s a state of mind, he says, that would likely have taken him years to gradually ease away from. But the first night he had Verde in his room, when a nurse checked to see if Hill was sleeping, the dog let out a tiny growl. To Verde, Hill says, the nurse’s stealthy approach seemed sneaky, and he was letting her know it wasn’t a good idea to sneak up on his buddy.

It wasn’t even conscious, Hill says, but “once he did that, I was like, ‘Hey!’ I just mentally picked up that somebody’s watching my back.”

The result was immediate and dramatic. Within the next few days, four doctors had gathered outside of Hill’s room, all puzzling over the new development, wondering what magical medicine could have caused this astonishing notation in the nurses’ log: *Chris slept.* 



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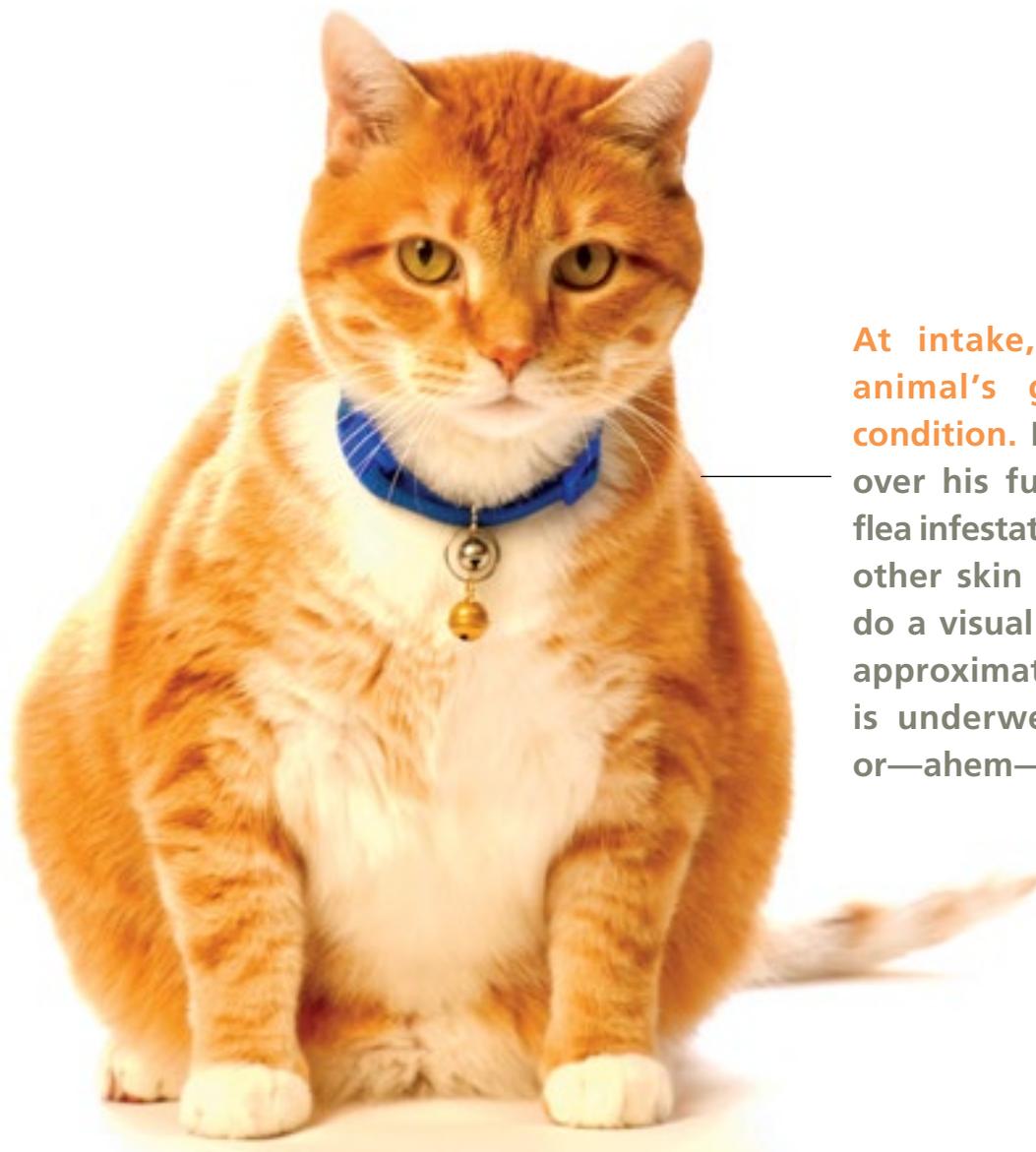
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Conducting a Basic Intake Exam

Expert tips from The HSUS Shelter Services team

BY SHEVAUN BRANNIGAN



At intake, look at the animal's general body condition. Run your hand over his fur to check for flea infestations, bumps, or other skin problems, and do a visual assessment to approximate whether he is underweight, healthy, or—ahem—a bit rotund.

The animal control truck pulls up to your shelter with a new group of strays, and at first all you hear is the engine. When that quiets, you hear the barks and whines of the animals arriving at your facility. Odds are your shelter is already full, and each new drop off can be overwhelming—especially if it's your job to find a space for the newcomers.

There's a temptation to throw up your hands at the thought of adding these new animals to the mix, and to cut corners to save time and stress. But while an intake exam—a basic checkup, which should be done on every animal who comes into your facility—seems like an added burden, it can actually save time down the line. With prac-

tice, an intake exam can be done quickly and efficiently. Ten minutes per animal can prevent confusion, disease outbreaks, and even lawsuits.

The intake exam, essentially, is a time to observe the animal's physical and behavioral issues and record them so they can be handled later (unless, of course, the issue appears



The intake exam is a time to multitask. Lift the animal's lip to determine an approximate age; raise the ear flap to see (or smell) whether there are any signs of infection. Check the paws for mats and to see if the toenails need trimming. Lift her tail to check for health problems in the rear, and conduct a sex check if the animal's gender isn't already clear.

to be a medical emergency). It should be performed on all animals entering the shelter—strays and owner surrenders—and should be conducted by two staff members in a less-trafficked, quiet space within the shelter so that observations can be made and recorded without constant interruption.

Why Examine on Intake?

For the health and safety of both the newly admitted animal and the existing shelter population, it's best to conduct an intake exam immediately upon the animal's arrival (or shortly thereafter) to determine where she should be placed in the shelter—general population, sick room, isolation, or the adoption floor. This is also the time to scan for a microchip, trace tags, assign the animal's shelter identification number, take her photo, administer routine vaccinations and deworming, and note your first impressions of the animal's behavior. It may sound like a lot of work, but it's really not, and can save the shelter from a deadly disease outbreak or an owner's accusation that the animal's matted, flea-infested, emaciated condition developed while in your custody. If there is a dated record that the dog or cat came in that way, such an allegation won't stick.

An exception to the immediate-intake exam rule should be made for exceptionally agitated or aggressive animals. These are the guys who may not be reacting well to having just been chased down, cornered, and netted by an ACO, or to being placed in a

crate and a car by an owner. They're understandably stressed. But if an animal seems a little more nervous than is safe for the intake team, give her a breather in an isolated room. Forcing your way through an exam with a potentially dangerous animal isn't going to benefit either of you. A sweet cat might turn scratcher, and that first bad experience in the shelter may freak her out for a while, setting a negative tone for her entire stay at the shelter, and lessening her chances of adoption. A calmer cat can be examined more quickly and easily.

Experienced staff members are crucial for an accurate exam. Intake exams are about spotting the animal's behavioral and health issues, and the animal's stress might mask, or even create, those symptoms. A stressed animal might shut down, and appear more docile than she actually is. An experienced intake examiner will sense when an animal is tolerating her tail being lifted due to apathy as opposed to panic. On the other hand, the animal may be well-behaved, but a drawn-out exam, coupled with a new environment, might lead to behaviors she wouldn't otherwise exhibit. By conducting the exam efficiently, you'll reduce the chance of stressing out an animal over the course of a longer handling session.

And even if the incoming animal is a docile rabbit, you're going to want two pairs of hands available while you work. Having two people present to examine the animal is a major time saver: One person can record findings, so the other doesn't have to

alternate between tasks or try to remember every finding. It's also helpful to have another person present to sense elevating stress levels.

In addition, the two-person approach allows multiple people to become familiar with the intake exam process. Experience and the confidence that results from it are the two biggest factors in a successful and speedy exam. Doubling up means that, over time, more people will develop these skills—a bonus for your shelter when someone is sick or leaves his job.

Learning the Ropes

Staff members sometimes mistakenly think that managing intake must be a time-consuming task. But the exam itself, when done correctly, should be a breeze for both staffers and the animal. Say the first animal to be evaluated is a cheerful golden Lab, for whom being chased around was nothing more than another game. A good half of the needed information can be determined with a glance, as soon as she walks in the room.

First, look at the dog's gait as she is led into the room: Is she limping? Record any problems with her walk. Lumps, bumps, scratches, cuts? Write them down! Another physical observation that can be estimated the moment she walks in the room is her weight. While an animal should ideally be weighed upon entry, that may not always be feasible, and when it's not, a quick visual assessment should enable you to place her as malnourished, underweight,

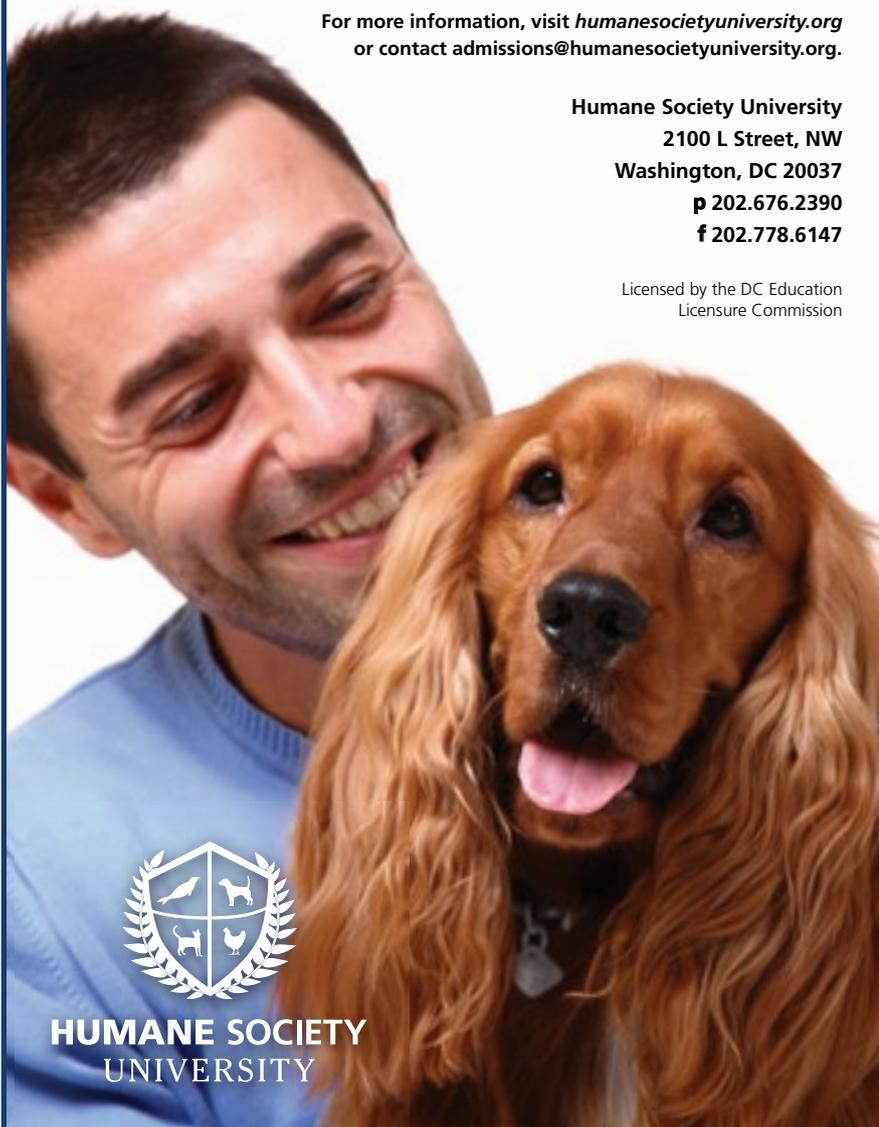
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healthy, overweight, or obese. Look for her ribs—are they prominent? Or, on the other end of the scale, well hidden under rolls of fat?

At this time you can also evaluate the eyes and nose for signs of discharge. Record all of your findings, and remember, during an intake exam, you're looking for behavioral and physical red flags to determine where the animal goes in the shelter, and what—if any—follow-up treatment she will need.

Without handling the animal, you can also see the condition of her fur. Severe matting may require immediate grooming, and if the animal is an owner surrender, you'll want to ensure that you've documented her condition to support possible cruelty charges.

Once you've conducted a basic exam, you'll need to put identification on the animal; collar IDs are a good practice.

This is a time to multitask. When you're nearing the animal's head to put on a collar, it's a good opportunity to lift the lip to determine an approximate age, raise the ear flap to see—or smell—whether there are any signs of infection, and of course to give a welcome scratch on the head. You can also run your hand quickly down the animal's fur to see if there are any flea infestations or skin problems. That same stroke down an animal's back can lead to lifting her tail, to check for health problems in the rear and to conduct the ever-important sex check if the animal's gender isn't already clear.

Unless anything else looks amiss, you're done.

The intake exam is a crucial part of the shelter stay. Without it, the chances of reuniting an animal with her owner are significantly lessened, your general population may become infected by sickness you could have spotted at the door, and an animal's health issues may not be addressed until it's too late. Five to 10 minutes per animal means a healthier shelter, which benefits both its furry guests and their human caretakers. **AS**

Editor's note: This is the first in an occasional series of "how to"-oriented 101s featuring tips from The HSUS's Shelter Services team. Let us know if there are issues your organization is struggling with and we may address them in a future article! Send questions to asm@humanesociety.org.

Success in South Florida

In Miami, Sara Pizano's focus on accountability reaps rewards



NIGEL CARSE/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

Sara Pizano took her talents to Miami long before LeBron James. And while it remains to be seen whether James will transform basketball's Miami Heat into champions, it's safe to say Pizano has turned around the once-struggling Miami-Dade Animal Services Department.

A veterinarian and graduate of Cornell University, Pizano has directed the department since June 2005. She landed her current position as a result of a 2004 evaluation of

the department by The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), which put forth 578 recommendations for improvement—including the hiring of an experienced director. Pizano fit that bill, having spent five and a half years as director of veterinary services for the Humane Society of Broward County in Florida.

Miami-Dade has shown steady improvement since Pizano's hiring and the October 2005 move to make the

department, which previously had been run by the local police, a standalone entity answering to the county manager. Annual adoptions have risen from around 3,000 to more than 8,000, and the total number of animals saved (adopted, transferred to a rescue partner, or returned to their owners) has more than doubled. The Florida Animal Control Association named Miami-Dade the 2009 Animal Control Agency of the Year, and awarded the department

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In this edited interview with *Animal Sheltering* associate editor James Hettinger, Pizano discusses some of her trials and triumphs, and her approach to shelter management.

Animal Sheltering: When you took over, what were the conditions like?

Sara Pizano: There were no pain medications. There was no management of the shelter population, so there was overcrowding and a very high infectious disease and mortality rate.

How did you go about establishing your priorities?

I had to think, what are the things I can fix now? For example, there was euthanasia of the animals who had adopters, so that had to stop first.

Why would animals who had adopters be euthanized?

Maybe they had coccidia. They weren't clinical or anything, but they just had coccidia. Adopters were not given an opportunity to adopt.

I had a 30 percent [staff] vacancy rate. The first thing to do was to hire a management team, and it actually ended up being a great thing that I had all those vacancies. To this day, I do every single interview, regardless of the position, because I want to hand-pick every person that comes on this team. I've probably done more than 400 interviews.

I want to make sure the staff knows my mission. And then you drill down and make sure the staff is, first of all, trained, knows what's expected of them, and then held accountable, which wasn't done before.

So at this point in time, over 75 percent of the staff are new with me.

There were some rough times in the beginning? There were even bomb threats?

I was not popular with the staff, because there were teams of [employees]—who are obviously no longer here—who were stealing animals. I came in and provided structure and



Sara Pizano, a veterinarian and director of the Miami-Dade Animal Services Department, took over a struggling agency in 2005 and has more than doubled its number of animals saved annually.

accountability, and they wanted me out. So there were four bomb threats that first year. We had to evacuate the building. I had to be escorted to my car when I left at the end of the day. I have panic buttons in my office. I was physically threatened by employees. I had to call the police to get them out of the building. It was a very ugly year.

When I got here, obviously I would do rounds a lot, and I noticed the dogs were huddled in the backs of the runs, shaking and really afraid. After about six months, I walked through the kennels and I realized all the dogs were running up to the front of the kennels, wagging their tails. I knew that we had reached a tipping point, especially with the kennel staff, because that [improvement] was in direct relation to how those animals were being treated. That was a huge epiphany for me—happy and sad at the same time.

What were some of the key policies you were trying to put into place?

In the beginning, it was really the flow of the animals through the shelter, because I look at the adoption area as prime real estate. That's where you want every single cage filled. And the thing is, I don't care if they have heart disease. You write on the cage card, "I have heart disease." So if there's a stray hold, and there's room in adoptions, who cares if they stay in adoptions but

are stray holds, as long as we have full disclosure? The main thing that I did right away was teach the staff how important the flow of the animals was, because the animals were getting stuck, and obviously we all know what happens then.

How did you get the staff to buy into what you were trying to do?

In a realistic way, they didn't have a choice, because there were euthanasias that shouldn't have happened. There were animals that could have been saved, potentially, so that's the common mission, that's the common goal, and if you'd like to work here, then that's gonna be your goal, too. And that's why, for me, it was so important to interview every person, because I want every single point of contact to be positive. So as you start hiring those team members that hear your mission and want to be a part of your mission, it kind of tips the scale.

We are not perfect. I still struggle every day here. I still have great challenges. There's still staff that are not where they need to be. But, for the most part, I think we've created a team that really does care for the animals. When you have a management team that understands that and buys into it, then that's going to trickle down to the line staff.

[q&a]

I imagine you had to cultivate relationships with other people in the community?

Yes, and that's one thing, I think, that surprised the staff initially. I remember one of the staff saying to me, "You know, Dr. Pizano, you let the media in, you interview all the time. Before, nobody would let the media in." And I said, "You know, when you're doing the right thing, then you're an open book, and you want the public to see what happens, because they're the ones that are going to change it." I want people to know that animals are euthanized here every day, and this community can change that.

I've established many partnerships. We have over 62 rescue partners. We have humane societies and rescue groups. We have partnerships with high schools, universities, technician programs, you name it. There were no volunteers when I got here, so I created the volunteer program in 2006. The volunteers, obviously, we couldn't do what we do without them. They're invaluable. The animals would not get the treatment that they do without the volunteers.

Animal services became a standalone department a few years ago. What impact has that had?

Well, before I came here, animal services was always under the umbrella of another department—health department, public works, police department—because nobody knows where to put animal services, because it's so unique. And part of the recommendation in the HSUS report was to have

the department answer directly to the county manager. So for me, it worked out beautifully, because the county manager is an animal lover. He wants to see things done right. He wants the department to succeed.

What are some of the challenges unique to your shelter and your community?

Certain things that we publish that have to be in three languages—English, Spanish, and Creole. But I would say 60 percent of our media outreach is in Spanish, because there's just such a huge Hispanic population here. One of the challenges is language. But the other is, Latin countries don't have the sheltering system that the United States has. So, for example, when they lose a dog, it's not their first thought to go to a shelter, because they don't know about shelters.

The [warm] climate, with cats reproducing, doesn't help, because it's a year-round problem.

And then, just the size: Our community is 2.4 million people. We're a 2,000-square-mile county. So the county continues to grow, as does the intake at animal services, unfortunately.

And then of course there's the financial side of it. We have no marketing budget. Everything we do is pro bono, and we probably get over \$100,000 of in-kind advertising, media time.

But of course it's not a focused, targeted market. It's basically whatever we can get for free. I still meet people who didn't even know where the shelter was, [had] never even heard of it.

We just continue to try desperately to keep the animals healthy in the shelter. But our problem is that a high percentage of pet owners don't vaccinate their puppies and dogs, and so they come into the shelter incubating distemper and parvo. It's just a vicious cycle.

Our building is archaic. It was built in the '60s, designed as an animal hospital. It in no way serves the purpose for what we do today. There's no air conditioning, and we're in Miami. The offices have air conditioning, and the lobby, but the

It doesn't matter how many animals you handle or how big or small your shelter is, you have to have a really good management team and very clear standard operating procedures, so that there's consistency.

animal spaces don't have air conditioning. It's the perfect storm, it's the perfect petri dish, for infectious diseases.

Do you have any universal advice that all shelters can benefit from?

It doesn't matter how many animals you handle or how big or small your shelter is, you have to have a really good management team and very clear standard operating procedures, so that there's consistency. With that, you provide the animals with the best care possible.

How is your budget situation generally?

As the department improves on every level, we've improved in just collecting money that was owed to us, which we were never good at. And so that allowed us to increase our budget from \$8.9 million to \$9.7 million this year. Everyone else had cuts. But the reason is, we did not have to depend on the general fund as much because we became better at generating our own revenue, and that's the secret. So, I got to add positions. I'm adding five kennel staff. I'm adding two technicians. That's huge for this day and time.

We do dog licensing, and that's another amazing area of opportunity. We only license 40 percent of the dogs, so right now we're really proactively working on capturing that other 60 percent.

Anything in particular that you're most proud of?

More than doubling the number of animals saved, I think, is the biggest accomplishment. [By] "saved" I mean adopted, went to rescue, or returned to their owners. Before I got here, it was 5,667, and this year was 13,942. I think that's really the biggest accomplishment. 



Avoiding Adopter Roulette

Preventing adopters from rehoming pets into potentially unsuitable conditions



Recently, a shelter contacted me with concerns about an adopter who gave his new rabbit away to a neighbor, without the shelter's approval. The practice is known as "rehoming," and is unauthorized under most adoption agreements. The shelter is now wondering what options it has to make sure the animal is safe in his new home.

Sound familiar? The case is similar to the 2007 situation involving Ellen DeGeneres, her hairdresser, the puppy Iggy, and the California rescue group Mutts & Moms. DeGeneres adopted Iggy from Mutts & Moms, and then gave the dog away to her hairdresser. Two weeks later, a representative of the rescue group contacted DeGeneres to check on Iggy. At that

point, she revealed that she had given the dog away, in violation of the written adoption agreement. Two days later, a representative for Mutts & Moms visited the new owner's home to retrieve the dog. Police officers were summoned and determined that Mutts & Moms should retain possession of the dog because the implanted microchip still listed Mutts & Moms as the owner. Despite a televised tear-filled plea by DeGeneres, the animal was taken from the hairdresser, returned to the shelter and eventually found a new home. Shortly thereafter, Mutts & Moms had a full-fledged public relations debacle on its hands, as several animal lovers and Ellen supporters barraged the rescue group with criticism and threats.

This may be the most famous example of an unauthorized rehoming, but it's a common situation, and one every shelter can guard against. A shelter's predominant function is to connect pets with loving owners in safe, healthy, and stable environments. Most shelters go to extensive lengths to scrutinize potential adopters, including prescreening interviews, detailed applications, and comprehensive adoption contracts. But once the adopter is approved and the adoption finalized, you have limited control over the well-being of the animal. Even worse, if an adopter decides to give the pet away to a third party, your shelter has no opportunity to determine the fitness of this new individual as

[humane law forum]

a pet parent. This explains why most adoption agreements limit the transfer-of-ownership rights of the adopter.

The question is, does a shelter have the right to reclaim an adopted animal if the adopter violates the adoption agreement by giving the animal away to a third party? And if it does, should it do so?

The Basics of an Adoption Contract

To understand a shelter's rights in the event of an unauthorized rehoming situation, we need to start with the basics of contract law. A contract is an agreement between two parties that creates an obligation to perform a specific duty. In order for a contract to be enforceable it must contain (1) an offer, (2) acceptance of that offer, and (3) consideration (the exchange of something of value by both parties). With regards to animal adoption contracts, these elements are met when (1) the shelter offers to provide the adopter with an animal, (2) the adopter agrees to accept the animal in exchange for an adoption fee, and (3) the shelter receives the fee in consideration for the adopter receiving the animal. If all of these elements are met, the adoption contract is valid and enforceable in court. While there are varying perspectives on the issue of freebie adoptions—some shelter folks feel they imply that the adopted animal has no “value,” while others believe that they can boost save rates—from a legal contract perspective, free adoptions create a potential complication. If the shelter does not charge a fee, some courts may find that there has been no value received by the adopter, and therefore no valid contract exists.

While these are the basics of contract law, the specifics vary from state to state and are highly influenced by previous similar cases in your jurisdiction or district. For this reason, it is wise to consult an experienced local contract attorney with an animal law background to draft the adoption agreement your shelter plans to use. As a general rule, a court will enforce the terms of a contract as long as they are clear, not illegal, and not grossly unfair. The best approach is to say in the contract that the transfer of ownership is prohibited, and clearly outline the consequences in the event an unauthorized rehoming occurs. The clearer the contractual language is, the more likely the court is

to enforce the adoption agreement. An example of a transfer-of-ownership clause is as follows: “Transfer of ownership of this animal is strictly prohibited without prior written authorization of adopting agent (your shelter/rescue group). If for any reason adopter is unable to keep this animal, adopter will notify the adopting agent immediately and cooperate with shelter in finding an appropriate home for this animal without refund of adoption fee. Appropriateness of a new home is to be determined exclusively by the adopting agent.”

This transfer-of-ownership clause creates what is legally referred to as a “condition subsequent,” meaning that if the adopter transfers ownership, then the shelter no longer has a legal obligation to provide the animal, and arguably, the shelter may reclaim the animal. Typically, these agreements do not place a time limit on transfer-of-ownership restrictions, meaning the shelter may attempt to reclaim the animal even five or 10 years after the original adoption.

So how does this all play out in the real world? Let's look at the case I was contacted about recently, where the original adopter let his bunny hop over to his neighbor's to live without approval from the shelter. If the shelter's adoption contract contained a comprehensive transfer-of-ownership clause, then the adopter breached the contract by giving the rabbit to a neighbor. When the adopter violates an agreed-upon term of the contract, you have the right to sue for breach of contract in civil court. The court will most likely determine that a valid agreement existed—one condition of which was that the ownership of the rabbit would not be transferred without the shelter's approval—and that the adopter has breached the contract.

If a breach of contract has occurred, then the court will determine what damages were suffered by the shelter and what legal remedies will best resolve the situation. Monetary damages are available—however, the goal of animal welfare groups is the well-being of the animal, so the primary objective is to reclaim the animal and find it a new home. Because the shelter is suing to force the adopter to perform a specific act stated in the contract (instead of just asking for money), the remedy sought is called “specific performance.”



Cherie Travis is adjunct professor of animal law at DePaul University College of Law and Northwestern University School of Law, and was the associate director of the Center for Animal Law at DePaul before being appointed commissioner of Chicago Animal Care and Control. She is president and cofounder of PACT Humane Society.

Generally, courts are reluctant to award specific performance when the aggrieved party can be satisfied with monetary damages, because money damages are easier to enforce. In order to obtain specific performance, you must show the court that (1) the contract is valid, (2) you performed your end of the bargain, (providing the adopter with an animal), and (3) that the item you want returned is so unique that it cannot be replaced by money. Any judge who understands the unique bond between humans and their pets will clearly agree that specific performance is imperative in pet adoption situation, because each animal is a unique individual. Unfortunately, in some states pets are still treated as non-unique goods. In these jurisdictions, a shelter will have a more difficult time convincing the judge that the specific performance of returning the animal is more appropriate than simply awarding money damages.

The Complication of a Third Party

Now you have a valid agreement, breached by the adopter, where an available legal remedy is the return of the animal. Case closed, right? Wrong! The biggest problem with this scenario is that the original adopter no longer has the animal—the neighbor does. Now your shelter is attempting to retrieve the

animal from a third party, one that did not agree to the terms of the original contract and may have no idea such a contract exists. This new owner may have even paid good money to purchase the rabbit, completely unaware of the preexisting adoption agreement.

To succeed in court, you will have to convince the judge to force the new owner to relinquish the dog, even though the new owner did not agree to the term of the original contract. One major hurdle: a major tenet of contract law which provides that a contract cannot give rights or impose obligations on any person except the parties that signed the original contract. The neighbor (or in the DeGeneres case, her hairdresser) did not sign the contract or agree to be bound by the transfer-of-ownership agreement. The law can get very complicated and jurisdiction-specific in this matter, but a brief rundown will give you an idea of the issues at play:

The best-case scenario is that the judge will determine the animal should be taken from the new owner and issues an official court order stating that the animal should be returned to your shelter. In practical terms, the court would deliver this order to the new owner (assuming she could be found), and, if the new owner did not voluntarily comply with the court order, a sheriff might be sent to recover the animal on the shelter's behalf.

Though the aforementioned scenario is entirely possible, you should be aware of the other, less-favorable outcomes you may be faced with. First, the judge could determine that the original adoption agreement was a contract for the sale of goods rather than an adoption. Under the Uniform Commercial Code, the purchase of an animal is treated like the purchase of any non-unique object. If the original transaction is deemed a sale instead of an adoption, then the title to the animal transferred to the "buyer" the minute the adopter received the animal. Because under most states' laws animals are still considered property, the court could view pets as mere "goods." Thus, there is a chance the transfer-of-ownership clause will be ruled an unenforceable part of the agreement, because your shelter is attempting to maintain an interest in a piece of property you no longer own. This is why it is best to always state clearly that the contract is an adoption agreement, not a sale, and that the adoption fee is a donation to cover the adoption costs.

An additional concern for your shelter is that even if the agreement is found to be an adoption not a sale, the court may look at the animal as a non-unique good and determine that specific performance (returning of the animal to the shelter) is unwarranted. In the event that the shelter is successful on the breach of contract claim, but reclamation of the animal is deemed unwarranted, the court will likely award monetary damages. Monetary damages are even more likely in situations where the contract specifically provides for them.

Because it is so difficult to enforce a contract against a third party (the new adopter), you should include in your adoption agreement contractual language that puts the original adopter on the hook for a "reclamation attempt fee," attorney's fees, and court costs. You may want to include a provision for "liquidated damages," which is a specified amount stated in the contract in the event of a breach. Liquidated damages are useful for situations like these, where a court may find it difficult to determine a dollar amount appropriate to the breach. Even if these fees are not granted in court, they may deter some adopters from breaching the contract in the first place.

Beyond the Law

All of the above deals with the legal issues involved in rehoming. Clearly this can be a complicated issue in the court of law, but it is fairly simple in the court of public opinion. Your shelter's mission should be about saving animals, not winning a court case. After the Ellen DeGeneres incident, Moms & Mutts received several threats and temporarily closed its shelter because of the bad publicity. Even though DeGeneres clearly breached the adoption agreement, Moms & Mutts came across to some as a vindictive shelter that lost sight of the ultimate goal here: to find great pets loving homes.

To avoid all the court costs and bad publicity associated with transfer-of-ownership disputes, you should work on maintaining an open dialogue with every new adopter. The critical time in an adoption is the first few weeks and months, when the fantasy of owning a cute pet turns into the reality of caring for a living being. In the early going, make sure to keep open lines of communication with your adopters to give

them any advice or guidance they may need. The more comfortable you can make them feel, the more honest they will be about the status of the animal.

Practically speaking, it will be hard for most shelters to determine whether an animal has been rehomed. Even with active post-adoption monitoring measures—usually one or two follow-up phone calls within a month of the adoption—the shelter is relying on the word of an adopter who has already been dishonest by breaching the adoption agreement. The best approach is to explain the policy against rehoming during the interview process and urge the adopter to contact the shelter if they can no longer take care of the animal, or want to give the animal to a third party.

If a rehoming does occur, work to achieve the best-case scenario: You can evaluate the new adopter, confirm that the animal will be safe with him, and have the new adopter sign a new contract with the shelter. If the adopter gives the animal away to someone very close to them (for example, a parent, spouse, or sibling), then the shelter may want to make an exception to this technical contract breach. Also, the longer it has been since the animal was originally adopted, the more likely it is that the original adopter will work to ensure their pet gets a loving new home. Be fair, realistic, and use common sense. If you have proof that the new home is truly inappropriate or unsafe, you'll have to deal with the worst case: Your shelter will have to initiate the legal remedies discussed above.

But if you find out an adopter has given away the animal, it is most likely because they were honest enough to tell you, as in the DeGeneres case. You should express appreciation for their honesty and work with the adopter and the new owner to make sure the new environment is safe for the pet. You should also ask the new owner to sign an adoption agreement. If at some later point you determine the new owner is unfit, then you can notify the authorities of animal cruelty, and turn to the courts with the original adoption contract. With a solid contract, a post-adoption monitoring program, and an alert yet compassionate staff, you will have fewer court battles and more animals in safe, loving homes. 

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Back to Basics: Shelter Cat Enrichment

Simple tips and tricks to help your stressed cats come back

BY DEBBIE SWANSON



When Orange Blossom, a 2-year-old female cat, began rubbing her face against the side of her kennel, staff at the Tuscaloosa Metro Animal Shelter became concerned. The friendly cat, who had arrived in early June, soon rubbed her face to the point where her fur was gone and her skin was raw.

"She was a nice cat, very adoptable, but it was just a slow time of year for us," says Linda Workman, assistant director and volunteer director at the Alabama shelter, explaining that the lack of visitors made the cat's stay longer than it should have been.

After receiving medical treatment, Orange Blossom healed and awaited her new home in a cat condo in the front of the building, where staff could keep a closer watch on her, and monitor her stress levels.

The more visible location worked to get her noticed, and in October, she was adopted.

"Her head cleared up, except for a patch of missing hair that may or may not come back," says Workman, who was thrilled to see the sweet-natured cat going home.

Like Orange Blossom, many cats do not adapt well to a shelter environment. But with a little intervention, shelter workers and volunteers can take steps to prevent problems.

Why Enrichment?

Jackson Galaxy, a cat behavior specialist from Los Angeles, Calif., is all too familiar with cats like Orange Blossom. Since the early 1990s, when he began working in shelters in the Denver, Colo., area, he has sympathized with the plight of shelter cats and sought ways to

improve their stays. His philosophy is based on a simple premise: Keep the cat in touch with his basic, natural instincts.

"All cats have an instinct to hunt, kill, and eat prey. For thousands of years, that was who they are. By awakening that, getting them involved in this through play, the cats let off steam. They became happier and more confident," he says.

To do this, he advocates what he refers to as "behavioral CPR." Going beyond simply visiting and petting a cat, he suggests workers and volunteers use play sessions to bring back a cat who sits frozen in the corner of his cage or in his litter box, nonresponsive to people or toys.

If the cat is willing, "take it to a room, and engage in interactive play. Use a wand or toy that you can interact with. If you

[behavior department]

can get the cat to chase and pounce on the toy—that's your success," says Galaxy. "That cat will go back to his kennel and feel happier, will start to engage with the people that visit, and hopefully will go home sooner."

Over the years, Galaxy has shared his methods with numerous rescue organizations and has traveled across the country conducting seminars on shelter animal behavior, with an emphasis on cats. He continues to hear reports back of happier cats and increased adoptions.

While daily play sessions with all resident cats are ideal, Galaxy recognizes limiting factors, such as time and staff, and suggests implementing a triage system. Train workers to identify cats in most need of attention: those who remain in a corner or inside a litter box, ignore visitors, avoid food and/or grooming, or engage in a repetitive or self-destructive behavior. Place higher focus on these cats, while including others as often as possible to ward off future problems.

Another key element is keeping a log for each cat, and making sure each person who interacts with the animals records the day, time, activity, and most importantly, the cat's reaction.

"Keep quiet music on," says Linda Workman. "We play classical music, Irish hymns, flute music." Be mindful of the volume, though—shelters are already noisy.

"This helps at the shelter, but even more importantly, [the information] can go home with the cat," he says. "This gives the adoptive family information to help them to bond more quickly, and reduces the chances that the cat will be returned to the shelter."

Slower Steps for the Frightened Cat

Like people, all cats have a unique personality, and what works for one cat



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may not work for the next. Particularly in a shelter setting, many cats arrive afraid and withdrawn, and will not welcome any interaction, play or otherwise.

"When you approach a new cat, see what kind of energy you receive back," says Galaxy. "If the cat remains cornered in his cage, or takes one step back for every step you take forward, your starting point isn't to get that cat to play. Your starting point will be to get the cat to come to you."

In this situation, he suggests what he calls "low value" interaction: Talk to the cat in a soft voice, avoid eye contact, keep hands low or out of sight, and keep at a profile. Avoid positioning yourself in the doorway. "Convince the cat you're not there to hurt them or trap them."

Do this several times a day, and instruct other shelter workers to do the same. Keep notes in the cat's log for each visit.

"Eventually, dangle a toy on a rod to draw the cat to the front of the cage. When you see that cat resume his primitive cat behavior—the hunter in him lights up, he looks at the toy interested, wide-eyed and unblinking—there's your success."

Train Your Cat Visitors

People often volunteer to walk shelter dogs, but few ask to come in and play with cats. The culprit is often a simple lack of public awareness. Many people don't realize that shelter cats need TLC, and volunteers may be unsure of how to interact with cats in a helpful, soothing way.

If your shelter is low on cat visitors, reach out to the public. You might start with local cat fancy and rescue groups, who'll already have good feline experience, and see if they might be able to provide some training for your less cat-savvy volunteers. Spread the word in the community and among your supporters, identifying what a typical cat visit entails. Spotlight a particular cat in need to help people make a connection. Use your newsletter to explain the kind of socialization that shelter cats need.

Once you've built up some volunteers, the next step is training. Brushing, patting, and snuggling with the cats is helpful, but it's also important to have interactive play sessions. Also, teach them not to simply accept a withdrawn cat.

"When you see a shy, withdrawn cat, the human response is to cuddle or talk to the

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"Disposable cardboard scratching posts, or scraps of carpet from installers, can help a cat get some exercise [and] mark his territory," suggests Kellie Snider.

cat," says Bob Andrusco, a behavior specialist at McHenry County Animal Control in Illinois, "To the cat, that's rewarding his shy behavior. Instead, redirect the cat to an activity." For example, Andrusco says, you can toss a ball or play with a laser toy; when the cat reacts to it, then reward her. That way, Andrusco says, the cat will learn that outgoing behavior brings on attention.

Small Steps Can Make Big Changes

It's a fact that a typical kennel doesn't yield much space, but there are things you can do to help a cat feel more comfortable. Kellie Snider, manager of animal behavior programs at the SPCA of Texas, says the staff members have found some ways to expand their resident cats' sense of real estate.

"One of our veterinarians, Dr. Shawn Ashley, thought of adding a shelf to offer more square footage and give cats a way to get away from the litter box. Now most of our cats choose to lay on top of the shelf, where they can stretch out, have some privacy, and be farther away from their litter boxes," says Snider.

The shelves have proved successful with most cats, but Snider says a few still opt to sit in the litter box. For these kitties, staff will often add a shoebox to the kennel; the cat can then crawl inside to sleep or simply feel more secure.

Another issue with many cats is their desire to have their litter box separate from their feeding and sleeping area. Place cats' bowls and litter boxes as far from each other as possible within a cage. Within smaller caging units, try hanging a curtain or privacy wall down the center of the cage, or giving the cat a box to climb in that will allow him to separate himself from his toilet area.

"If you can give a cat a hiding space, they can have a place to rest, de-stress," says Snider. "There is some logical concern that if a cat is hiding he won't be adopted, but it's also important to think about the well-being of the cat."

If the cat is hiding too frequently and missing out on visiting opportunities, take steps to draw the cat out, or remove the hiding spot periodically during public visiting hours.

Reach Out for Donations

At the Tuscaloosa Metro Animal Shelter, public kindness and donations have gone a long way toward making the cats' living quarters more comfortable.

"My grandmother crochets rectangular pads for the cats, and they love to lay on them," Workman reports. Spreading the word among senior citizens' organizations or knitting supply stores may yield a similar outburst of comfortable resting spots for your feline residents.

"If you have a cat room available for playing, try to mimic a home environment. Our larger cat room has a couch, chair, and TV," says Bob Andrusco.

"We also use donated pieces of rug, paper bags from grocery stores, pillowcases from hotels," Workman reports. "People are willing to help, if you ask them." Other potential donated materials include shoe boxes for hiding spots and shelving material.

It can be difficult to find the time and resources to reach out to each cat in your care. But sometimes just a few changes can help break the cycle for a feline dealing with stress or depression. Happier cats and quicker adoptions will reward the entire shelter community. [AS](#)

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You Deserve a Break Today

A shelter pairs staff and dogs for extra attention, treats, and time outside the kennel

BY JIM BAKER



Animal caregiver Jessie Wermager enjoys a little mealtime companionship with shelter resident Frankie, a 6-year-old Pekinese-Pomeranian mix. Frankie is one of many dogs who've gone through the shelter's Out to Lunch program; he was adopted shortly after this photo was taken in December.

Snowball had some issues.

A female, black-and-white pit bull mix, Snowball had been "adopted out twice, and she was very, very mouthy," says Kathie Jaster, canine behavior specialist and humane officer at Washington Humane Society in Slinger, Wisc. "She ended up [in the second home] jumping up on someone's bed, and growling at them. Each time she came back to us, she came with a little more baggage."

Snowball's behavior problems—and her revolving-door appearances—made her a perfect candidate for the shelter's Out to Lunch program for adoptable dogs, which started in spring 2010.

Jaster got the idea for the program when she noticed that whenever she had a shelter dog in her office for a little socialization time, the dog would typically wander down the hallway to the staff break room, where people were eating lunch. The dogs liked hanging out there, and staff enjoyed spending time with them beyond cleaning their kennels.

"I thought, 'Well, gee, this is easy. Why don't we do this with all of our dogs?'"

The program's a snap to run. Staff members are assigned to work in different areas of the shelter each week; whoever is scheduled to clean the kennels on the adoption floor is paired up with a dog who has been at the shelter for a long time or has some behavioral issues.

The staff member and the selected dog become lunch buddies for the week. "I take about five minutes before I sit down to eat to let the dog go to the bathroom outside, so that he or she is able to spend time with us without having to worry about any potty accidents," says Chrissie Perkins, an animal caregiver. "Then I bring the dog back in, and we let them roam, and we see how they react in that environment."

Dogs stay with their lunch buddy for half an hour, and they can explore, nap on a dog bed, perform a "sit" for treats, or go with staff to an outdoor courtyard for playtime.

The dogs enjoy the freedom of being out of their kennels and off leash, getting extra attention from staff and whoever's in the office that day, even getting to meet staff members' pets who are visiting. "They absolutely love it—their tails are wagging the whole time," Perkins says.

The two-legged lunch buddies enjoy the program, too.

"It just gives you that break from the mundane, 'I'm only with the animals because I'm cleaning or trying to get them adopted.' It gives us the opportunity to really get to know the animals, so when we are trying to get somebody to adopt them, we can give them that much more information," Perkins adds.

The lunch breaks also give staff added insight into the behavior of the dogs: who's a jumper, who's a beggar at the table, who's an unrelenting counter surfer. Then staff can work with the animals, offering treats for positive behavior, such as sitting calmly while people are eating. Meanwhile, the dogs—some of whom are stressed out from months spent at the shelter—get some time in a real-life environment.

Marnie Brown, the shelter's executive director, thinks the program improves the chances that dogs will get adopted. "The more we know about them, the easier it is to place them in the right homes," she says.

It worked for Snowball.

"She thought it was OK to jump and play and try to tug things out of your hand. She also wanted to jump up onto the table while we were eating lunch," Perkins says. Staff taught her that she wouldn't get any treats unless she was calm, sat, and waited patiently. She also learned not to grab at dangling objects, such as a scarf or the keys in a person's hand. The program "gave her that extra half hour of training every day," Perkins says.

For Snowball, the third time was the charm—she got adopted again, and the staff has heard back from her new family that all is well. **AS**



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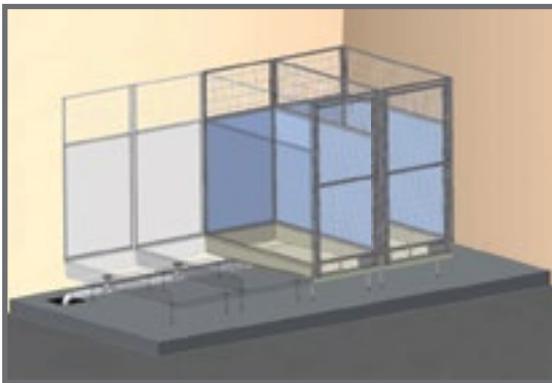


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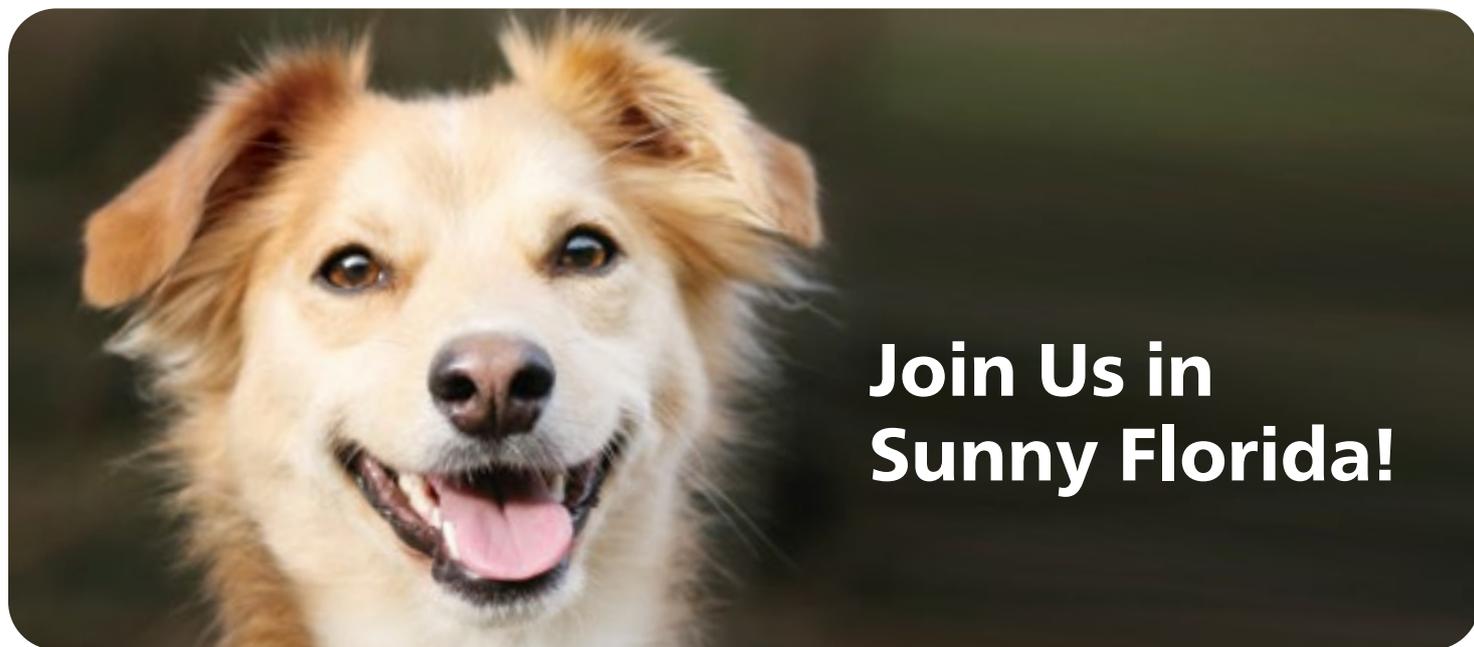


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