

ANIMAL Sheltering

May/June 2010

The Magazine for Animal Care Professionals and Volunteers

The Hazards of
"Do Not Adopt" Lists
Finding Shelter Insurance

Reaching the
Senior Community
Golden Years for Animals and Elders



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Reaching Out to Seniors

With Americans living longer and healthier lives, senior citizens make up a larger portion of the population. Many have pets but may need occasional assistance in caring for them; many who don't have pets might benefit from a little furry company. Some shelters are reaching out to their communities' elders, bringing them pet supplies and assistance, or—through animal visitation programs—affection and attention on four paws.



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A Tribute to Mutts

Once disparaged as “mongrels,” mixed-breed dogs are actually the ultimate hybrids—each one like a purebred unto itself. Shelters might do well to follow the example of boutique stores and let the public know that their available mutts are really something unique—a treat for true dog lovers.



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An Unexpected Truth

When a new breed-specific ordinance in Omaha threatened to undo all the work the Nebraska Humane Society had put into trying to place some of the shelter's pit bulls and pit bull mixes, the organization made the best of an unfortunate situation. A revised city ordinance aims to change the human end of the leash, making people aware that irresponsible pet owners are a big part of the problem.

While you're busy protecting animals, you also need to protect your organization—and that includes getting insurance coverage to guard against potential liability in the form of injuries. Some insurance companies are reluctant to write policies for animal welfare organizations—seeing them as inherently risky—but you can convince them you're a good bet. The “101” Department, p. 39

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6 Scoop

A low-cost spay/neuter program helps the poor of Washington state spay and neuter their animals; animal welfare advocates contest the tradition of carriage horses in New York; a raptor rehabilitator returns a hawk to the skies after she makes a wrong turn—through someone's dining room window; an event involving the Brooklyn Bridge and glow-in-the-dark leashes raises money and awareness for shelter pets; a Louisiana community devastated by Hurricane Katrina celebrates the long-awaited opening of a new animal shelter; and more.

22 Coffee Break

In your space, you told us how your organization handles naming adoptable animals, who does it, if any names are forbidden, and whether some names have more appeal to adopters.

39 The "101" Department

Insurance companies have traditionally taken a dim view of writing policies for shelters and rescue groups, seeing them as complex, vaguely mysterious operations rife with potential for lawsuits. But you can take steps to persuade insurance carriers that your organization is responsible and trustworthy—in other words, worth the risk.

45 Q&A

Haunted by scenes of neglect and cruelty she'd witnessed as a result of pets being chained for long periods—sometimes until they starved to death—Paulette Dean, executive director of the Danville Area Humane Society, was determined to end the practice in her Virginia community.



49 Humane Law Forum

Animal welfare advocates and shelter staff may have the best of intentions when they forward an e-mailed "DNA" (Do Not Adopt) recommendation. But doing so can test the limits of free speech and even stray into illegality, possibly leading to claims of defamation, libel, or slander.

53 Volunteer Management

Both inexperienced and expert volunteers can be helpful to your program, but the last thing you want to do is bring in "green" volunteers and fail to provide them the training they need. This happens all the time in shelters and rescue groups, and it's a setup for frustration and disappointment. Learn how to match volunteers' skill sets to the tasks that need to be done.

60 Off Leash

In a chance encounter during a trip to India, British photographer Eloise Leyden stumbled upon TOLFA (Tree of Life for Animals), a nonprofit that cares for former street dogs at its sanctuary in Pushkar. The people (and canines) she met there played a role in the creation of her photography book, *Slum Dogs of India*.

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The Legal Side of Adoptions

I have been reading your article on “Discrimination at the Adoption Counter,” (Jan-Feb 2010, p. 49). Something that happened at our shelter reminded me of one of the examples presented.

We had a couple from a larger town 204 miles south of us drive to our shelter to adopt a puppy. Within a few days the puppy had passed from parvo. ... Per our adoption contract, we issued a voucher so this couple could adopt another animal. The girlfriend returned, decided on a beautiful, long-haired German shepherd, signed papers once again, and drove the dog home.

The boyfriend is a large-framed African-American, and the adult dog she adopted seemed to be afraid of him (he's afraid of most men). She returned the dog, wanting her money back.

It is noted in our adoption papers that only vouchers can be issued, but by this time she was angry and threw out “lawsuit” conversation. We feel we are protected with our current adoption form, but she has written a letter to our board of directors insisting on a complete refund.

Please share your thoughts.

—A reader in Minnesota

Cherie Travis, author of the article,

offered some suggestions, excerpted here:

You may want to consider refunding all or some portion of the adoption fee with a letter stating that it is a goodwill gesture and not a contractual obligation. You might want to point out that you are doing this, in part, because she honored the contract and returned the dog to you. (You said she lives more than 200 miles away, so bringing the dog back was an effort on her part. She could have dumped the dog or given it away.)

Going forward, you could avoid this problem by implementing a policy that all members of the household be present for the adoption (even if it was as part of the voucher). That way, you can observe each person's interaction with the animal and ensure a good fit before it leaves your facility.

In the first few months of 2010, some of the news from animal welfare groups around the country was anything but warm and fuzzy. The director of an Ohio shelter pleaded guilty to animal cruelty charges, after animals in the care of the facility were found to be sick and living in their own filth. In California, an animal control officer was put on leave after pleading guilty to a cruelty charge. The director of an animal shelter in Tennessee was arrested, along with several other staff, on cruelty charges. In Texas, 64 animals were seized from a rescue group after many of them were found to be starving.

We're sure you'll agree with us when we say ... *yuck*.

These groups had similar missions, but different operating policies. They were a no-kill shelter, a public humane society, a county animal control department, and a rescue group, respectively. The one thing they had in common was that, in ways big or small, their mission to shelter and protect animals had somehow run off the rails.

As all of us work toward the end of euthanasia of healthy, treatable animals, we should keep these cases in mind.

While saving animals' lives should be a primary focus at shelters, reasonable people can still differ about euthanasia policies. Many excellent, compassionate shelters still euthanize to cope with the influx of animals into their facilities. Many excellent, compassionate rescue groups and limited-admission shelters do not. And in spite of the differences in their operating

Editor's note: In a follow-up letter to *Animal Sheltering*, the letter writer reported that her board members decided to deny the refund. They sent the couple a letter that included a portion of the shelter's liability release, which explains that adopters are responsible for the costs incurred following adoptions, and that adopters shall not hold the humane society responsible for adopted animals' pre-existing medical conditions. They offered a voucher, which the client turned down; the matter appears to have been resolved.

policies, many of these organizations have learned to work together to make the biggest possible difference for the animals in their communities.

What reasonable people who care for animals should not differ on is standards of care for the animals they're sheltering. Whatever your policy on euthanasia, your policy for the living should be clear and uncompromising. The Farm Animal Welfare Council's Five Freedoms state the case best: Animals deserve freedom from hunger and thirst; freedom from discomfort; freedom from pain, injury and disease; freedom to express normal behaviors, and freedom from fear and distress.

Every organization that takes in animals should self-assess on a regular basis. Ask: Are we providing the basics to the animals we care for so much? And if not, can we really call our passion “compassion,” or has it become something darker?

Animal rescue and sheltering work is dirty, difficult, heartbreaking, and incredibly valuable. The work you do inspires us every day. So keep the Five Freedoms in mind, and remember: Anything worth doing is worth doing well. We can disagree on plenty, but we have to agree on that.

If you're struggling, The HSUS has resources that may help. Check out the Programs and Services section of animalsheltering.org, and remember, many of our old issues are available in our online resource library.

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

We would add that such situations have at least two aspects—a legal aspect and a customer-service aspect. Shelters should be aware that while they may be legally protected by their adoption contract, they may not be protected from bad word-of-mouth.

Got a question? Enjoyed a story? Write to us at asm@humanesociety.org.

On the Road Again

In Washington state, a mobile clinic helps disadvantaged people and pets

BY CARREEN MALONEY



Veterinary technician Kathryn Weiss adjusts the lighting for Karen Mueller in the van's surgery bay, which provides cramped but functional quarters.

It's barely 6 a.m. in northern Washington state, cold and still dark on a December morning before Christmas, but people are already arriving in the parking lot of a big-box store.

They might be mistaken for bargain hunters trying to snag a deal on holiday gifts, and in fact, they are here to save. But the deals they're after won't be found inside the Bellingham Big Lots store. Instead, the big savings are found inside a truck parked outside, one that serves as a mobile spay/neuter clinic.

The Whatcom Education Spay and Neuter Impact Program (better known as WeSnip) operates out of a mobile spay/neuter vehicle, one of two Spay Stations owned by Pasado's Safe Haven, an animal rescue organization in Sultan, Wash. The two organizations are collaborating to serve Whatcom and Skagit counties' working poor, unemployed, and those on social assistance—and, of course, their pets.

Their mission is to reduce animal births and, in turn, the community's euthanasia rates. Their target is low-income communities, helping families who can barely afford to look after themselves. The crew on board do what they can to remove any obstacles that might prevent people from spaying and neutering, whether the barriers are practical, financial, or educational.

"If you don't do it, they won't come," says Patricia Maass, co-founder of WeSnip.

The group's proactive approach resonates with its clients, some of whom have been known to sleep overnight in their cars to make sure they're on time to drop off their animals before they have to get to their jobs.

"That's a big commitment," says WeSnip volunteer Chris Haulgren, standing in the lot beside a battered brown van laden with file-filled boxes, checking people in and handing out identification placards for their dash-

boards. The placards tell staff all the animals have been signed in, and once they have, the pets are rounded up and brought onto the Spay Station for the day.

Come Together

In 2008, WeSnip was created to administer a low-income spay/neuter program in the Bellingham area. It was desperately needed in the community, and WeSnip's creators, Maass and veterinarian Karen Mueller, who met years ago at a spay/neuter event, wanted to find a way to meet the need.

Maass had been a volunteer and foster program coordinator at Whatcom Humane Society (WHS) for five years. In her time there, she'd sat with many animals and tried to provide comfort to them during euthanasia, but the death rates had begun to discourage her. That's why she helped put together this crew, she says—because by taking this act on the

road, it means other animals won't have to die in her arms.

Mueller had been an animal welfare activist since veterinary school, and when she became a veterinarian, she gravitated toward animal rescue. Along with local projects, she's taken several trips to Mexico to spay and neuter strays for Compassion Without Borders, a volunteer group of veterinarians and other animal advocates who help unwanted pets south of the border.

In 2001, she had worked on the first Spay Station, still operated by Pasado's Safe Haven. That's where she got to know Susan Michaels, the founder of Pasado's. So when the WeSnip team was trying to figure out what kind of spay/neuter assistance would be the best fit for their community, it seemed natural for Pasado's to fund the project, and to lend WeSnip the second Spay Station.

Pasado's only expectation is that Mueller and her team reach 3,500 sterilizations a year, says Michaels—a goal the group is well on the way to meeting.

The alliance enables people to get the help they need—people like Tammi Lynch, who's still in her fleecy pajamas when she pulls her car into Big Lots. Toting a sleeping toddler, Lynch explains that she took in a stray cat who had kittens before she could afford to get her spayed.

Thanks to the Spay Station, that won't happen to the next generation. If Lynch pays \$30 to spay the mother, WeSnip will fix the kittens for free.

Lynch is grateful for the help. "I wish I had more money to donate to them," she says.

Tomorrow, the van and its skeleton crew of vets, vet techs, and volunteers will move on to a new location. They cover a 50-mile stretch, sterilizing every cat and dog they can find. Since hitting the road in August 2008, WeSnip has fixed an impressive 3,400 animals.

Making a Dent

Their work seems to be having an impact on shelter numbers. WHS, one of the shelters serving the area traveled by WeSnip, has logged a significant decrease in feline intake, from 2,915 cats in 2007 to 2,422 in 2009. That's almost 500 fewer cats in a community that—like so many—is constantly battling huge surpluses.

And while there's no way to prove definitively that it's the truck that's caused the drop, WHS staff see a correlation.

"We have noticed a substantial drop in our cat and kitten incoming animal population, and because of this, a reduction in our euthanasia numbers," says WHS executive director Laura Clark. "WeSnip is incredible."

There's a big bill for WeSnip to keep on truckin'. The customized Spay Station cost about \$385,000 to purchase, and operating expenses ran about \$238,000 last year. Pasado's paid \$164,000 of that amount, WeSnip collected \$57,000 from its clients, and another \$17,000 came in from miscellaneous donors. This year the Spay Station will ramp up its schedule from two or three days a week to four, and the operating budget will likely increase to more than \$300,000.

Thanks to Pasado's grant money, spay/neuter prices are deeply discounted from those charged at traditional veterinary clinics. Rates range from \$30 to \$60, depending on species and gender.

But about half of the surgeries are performed at no charge, for people on social assistance. Given such a great offer, you might think that getting clients to take advantage of the services would be the easiest part of the job.

In fact, Maass says, it's the most difficult.

Reaching the Underserved

Many of the people targeted by WeSnip live in neighborhoods characterized by poverty, crime, and rampant addiction. Some are senior citizens living on fixed incomes, or disabled people with service animals, or students who obtained a pet on impulse and don't really have the money to provide the necessary care.

Making arrangements to sterilize these animals can require cajoling, counseling, and educating. Unusual situations are the norm; it all comes with the territory. It's crucial to be accommodating, and so is having a phone line with a real person to answer questions, rather than the ubiquitous voicemail mes-

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- More answers to this issue's Coffee Break question are at animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak.
- Go to animalsheltering.org/mouthpieces to download campaign materials promoting spay/neuter.
- Use the chart provided at animalsheltering.org/volunteer_skills to identify the knowledge and abilities needed for any volunteer position in your agency.
- Read the complete interview with Paulette Dean about her shelter's anti-chaining campaign at animalsheltering.org/Danville_chaining.



A teenager brings her cherished black cat in for surgery on the Spay Station.

sage. WeSnip's clients, Maass says, "need a lot of encouragement" to take advantage of the service.

Maass and Mueller recall recent cases. There were the people who were supposed to bring their pets in, but called to say they couldn't make it because their car was stolen. And the pregnant woman who was about to set off toward the clinic, ready to walk for miles in the rain with her two cats. Both times, WeSnip quickly arranged transportation.

"That kind of drama doesn't happen at a regular clinic," says Mueller. "When was the last time one of us had to decide whether to walk through the rain for an hour so our animal can get surgery? None of us have that difficulty."

Forging trust and building rapport with people who are accustomed to being treated poorly and looked down upon are essential

[scoop]



Volunteer Chris Haulgren greets a client bringing his pit bull to be fixed at the Pasado's Spay Station.

to the project's success. "We're gaining momentum because we're reaching out to these groups," says Maass. "You can't be the least bit rude, condescending, or judgmental. They don't want people to make fun of them."

That can happen at a regular veterinary clinic. Even if they could scrape together enough money to cover the cost of an expensive surgery, some of WeSnip's clients are illiterate, so they can't fill out forms, and they can't read the after-care information that explains what their pets will need in the hours following surgery. That's why a WeSnip staffer always takes the time to explain everything when clients return to pick up their animals at the end of the day.

"Every customer is treated well," Maass says. "When I see someone with holes in their shoes who's got no teeth, I say, 'Yeah!' That's who we want. That's our clientele."

Spreading the Word

To find potential customers, WeSnip haunts the same places its target market hangs out. "We go where they sell beer, lottery tickets, and cigarettes, because that's our clients' recreation," Maass says.

Besides putting WeSnip's services on Craigslist and placing classified ads in free community newspapers, the group also spreads the word by dropping fliers at libraries, farm stores, food banks, and social services agencies.

But these methods aren't as effective as old-fashioned word-of-mouth. "We consider it a real compliment when our clientele refers their friends to us," Mueller says, noting that most clinics offering the occasional special discount don't want it publicized. "Clinics usually say, 'Don't tell anyone I did you a favor.' We want people to tell all their friends."

It's a purpose that inspires others to be part of the project—volunteers like Chris Haulgren, who checks in animals five mornings a week. The program's impact on her has been profound.

"I've been doing rescue for 25 years," Haulgren says, tears welling in her eyes. "And this is the first time I've had hope." **AS**

Carreen Maloney has been a writer and animal rescuer for 20 years. She lives in Washington state and created the humane education website fuzzytown.com.

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[scoop]

Trotting on Empty

Advocates push to ban New York City carriage horses

BY JAMES HETTINGER

To some, horse-drawn carriage rides are a New York City tradition, an enjoyable way to experience the beauty of Central Park or the bustle of Times Square—and a quintessential Big Apple experience, like watching a game at Yankee Stadium or ascending to the top of the Empire State Building.

Others, though, believe the enjoyment the rides provide isn't enough to justify the stress the horses experience as they trudge through clusters of honking, exhaust-spewing taxis over asphalt that's hard on their legs.

For decades, carriage horses have carted people through city streets and Central Park, and the debate has intensified in recent years. The industry wants to carry on a tradition it asserts is safe and nostalgic, while animal welfare advocates are decrying the horses' "nose-to-tailpipe" existence and calling for the business to be discontinued. The New York City Council, which failed to act on a ban then-council member Tony Avella first proposed in 2007, is reconsidering that proposal and mulling a new bill—one that would phase out the carriages in three years, replacing them with eco-friendly replicas of antique cars.

"Horses do not belong in cities in this day and age. It's really inhumane, and it's very dangerous for both the people and the animals," says Stacy Segal, an equine protection specialist for The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). The animals spook easily, resulting in accidents with motor vehicles, she says. "Traffic and horses really do not mix."

Several high-profile accidents in recent years galvanized activists and drew attention to the dangers of the industry. In September 2007, for example, a carriage horse named Smoothie panicked upon hearing someone beating a drum near Central Park. The horse bolted onto a sidewalk and then collapsed and died after the carriage she was hauling got caught between two trees, according to news reports.

Smoothie's death occurred days after the city comptroller's office had issued its first-ever audit of the way the city oversees the industry, which consists of 68 licensed carriages, about 200 horses, and nearly 300



City streets are no place for horses, according to animal welfare advocates pushing to ban New York's horse-drawn carriages.

licensed drivers. Among other concerns, the audit found that the horses weren't getting enough water, risked overheating on hot asphalt, and were left to stand in pools of dirty water because of inadequate drainage where they line up. The city was faulted for its failure to provide adequate oversight of the industry—the veterinarian from the city's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene never went into the field to inspect the horses, the audit noted, and the Department of Consumer Affairs did not perform the required number of carriage inspections.

A 2009 follow-up audit found that the city had implemented seven of the earlier audit's 11 recommendations to improve procedures for oversight. But the 2009 audit also discovered new issues, including the health department's failure to maintain an accurate list of horse licenses.

Animal welfare advocates say the industry's standard operating procedures remain troubling.

"Our New York City office is right by Central Park, and we definitely see day in and day out how mixing horses and traffic is an inhumane and dangerous combination," says Patrick Kwan, the New York state director for The HSUS, which supports both the proposed ban and the phaseout plan. City regulations prohibit carriage horses from working when the temperature drops below 18 or rises above 90, but Kwan says wind chill and humidity aren't taken into account, leaving the animals to work in extreme heat and bitter cold. They stand in hack lines for hours with no shelter from the elements, and walking on pavement takes a toll on their legs, he adds. Many people assume the carriage horses live in the park and get to frolic there after working hours, but in fact most are kept on the west side of Manhattan in stalls that Kwan says barely allow them to lie down. Carriage horse companies, rather than taking care of retired horses for life, sometimes sell them for slaughter.

The proposal to ban the industry outright attracted only about a half dozen supporters on the 51-member city council in 2007. Council member Melissa Mark-Viverito says the 2009 election added some progressive members to the council, so she hopes to gain more support for the new bill mandating the phased-in switch to replica antique cars—for which she is the lead sponsor.

The new bill has the backing of an advocacy organization called New Yorkers for Clean, Livable, and Safe Streets (NYCLASS). The proposal aims to be more palatable to horse-carriage operators by phasing out the business over three years and creating an alternate industry to prevent the loss of jobs. Each year, a certain number of carriages would be discontinued and replaced by replica cars with hybrid-electric engines that shut off when the cars stop, minimizing exhaust. The early-20th-century-style cars would give passengers “a feel of nostalgia, as the horse carriages currently purport to do,” while adding modern safety features—such as seat belts—that the carriages lack, says Jared Rosen, NYCLASS’s executive director. The cars would move slowly in the park and be better able than horses to keep up with traffic on city streets, he explains. Similar businesses currently operate in San Francisco and Prague.

Stephen Malone isn’t buying the idea.

A licensed carriage driver since 1987 and the executive director of the Horse and



Carriage horses in New York City mix with vehicular traffic and work in wintry weather.

Carriage Association of New York (which represents industry workers), Malone calls the replica-car proposal “a completely unfounded business” and notes that the cars currently don’t exist. “There’s no way they’re gonna build 68 cars just for us, and then just hand them to us.”

Jake Delemani, a NYCLASS lobbyist, says the car manufacturer is still undetermined. Carriage owners would have to purchase the cars, but financing would be available through the nonprofit Partnership for New York City.

Further, Malone defends his industry’s safety record, asserting it has experienced only three horse deaths related to traffic in 25 years and has never been cited for cruelty.



Carriage horses like this one in New York’s Times Square lead what animal welfare advocates call a “nose-to-tailpipe” existence—which has prompted proposals to ban the industry.

The efforts to ban the industry lack merit, he adds. “I’ll say one thing: Have we had accidents? Do we have mishaps? Of course we have. We’re not infallible here,” Malone says. “We operate in the city, but our track record is our track record, and that’s all we can say about that.”

Pamela Corey, a veterinarian and director of equine veterinary services for the ASPCA (which monitors the industry), says that while no carriage horse owners have been charged with state cruelty law violations, horses have been found to be overworked, and consumer affairs regulations have been violated—resulting in appropriate summonses. Individual horses are suspended from work if they’re found to be lame or have other medical conditions, Corey says. “If the owner does not comply with these directives—and it happens a few times a year that we suspend an individual horse—then they would be guilty of cruelty,” Corey says. “So we effectively prevent this.”

The ASPCA enforces state and local animal protection laws in New York City—conducting monthly stable inspections and monitoring the horses on the streets—but Corey notes that, unfortunately, “not all behavior that is inhumane or commonly understood as ‘cruel’ is illegal.”

And while there may have been only a handful of accidents causing horse fatalities over the years, she adds that there are anecdotal reports of incidents involving horses and pedi-cabs, pedestrians, and yellow taxis.

The ASPCA backed Avella’s proposed ban and also supports NYCLASS’s plan to replace the horse carriages with the eco-friendly replica cars.

The plan to replace the carriage horses with cars isn’t drawing unanimous support from animal welfare advocates. Elizabeth Forel, president of the Coalition to Ban Horse-Drawn Carriages—an advocacy group that formed in 2006—says she favors the bill “that would ban the industry outright and not be caught up in the promotion of a fledgling industry.”

“What I’d say to her is the solution that NYCLASS is proposing is a practical solution,” responds Delemani. “... It’s more practical to do it this way because the city council’s not looking to put anyone out of business.” **AS**



Bright Leashes, Big City

Brooklyn Bridge dog walk raises money and awareness for shelter pets

As he was walking across the Brooklyn Bridge one day last spring, Joseph Hassan got an idea. The bridge connects the borough to Manhattan, but Hassan was considering another connection: the one between the home foreclosure crisis and abandoned animals.

Hassan, an animal lover and public relations consultant who lives in Brooklyn, had seen a TV news report that included an ASPCA estimate that as many as a million pets nationwide might lose their homes due to foreclosures. "That number just kind of struck me," Hassan recalls. "Obviously we've all thought about the direct impact that foreclosures and the economy have on us humans, but I'd never really thought about it kind of trickling down to pets as well."

Hassan soon hatched a plan for a benefit dog walk across the bridge to increase awareness of the plight of homeless pets and raise money for animal shelters. Dubbed the Brooklyn Bridge Pup Crawl, the Sept. 26 event attracted about 300 people and 400 dogs, and raised an estimated \$4,000 for three animal shelters around the country.

The support the event received from New York pet lovers "was really humbling and satisfying," Hassan says. And it was also colorful, thanks to the glow-in-the-dark "Lulu Leashes" donated to Pup Crawl participants by the device's inventor, Betty Gottfried, a retired dentist and the mother of one of Hassan's friends.

"The leashes actually really helped out, because they kind of made everyone visible to the other folks who were on the bridge," says Hassan, explaining that participants walked from the Manhattan side to the Brooklyn side on the walkway that runs above the bridge's lanes for motorized vehicles.

"From a distance, you just saw all these illuminated leashes," says Gottfried, whose battery-powered invention—developed years ago after she and her dog were almost hit by a car during a nighttime run—comes in two different glowing color combinations. "It added to the whole allure of the evening."

The organizers decided to expand their focus beyond New York to emphasize that pet homelessness is a nationwide problem. The Pup Crawl website included donation



Participants in the Brooklyn Bridge Pup Crawl last September lit up the night with the help of illuminated leashes donated by Lulu Leash.

links to three shelter websites: the Brooklyn Animal Rescue Coalition (BARC), Get-A-Life Pet Rescue in Florida, and Ace of Hearts in California. BARC is in Hassan's neighborhood, while Florida resident Gottfried suggested Get-A-Life, and a friend of Hassan's in California suggested Ace of Hearts. Walk registration was free, but participants were encouraged to donate to those shelters or another of their choice, Hassan says.

Getting Gottfried and her illuminated leashes involved proved to be a key connection, Hassan says, because "we could encourage people to attend and kind of light up the night to draw attention to the cause."

Christine Kim, a friend of Hassan's who works in the fashion industry, became a co-organizer of the event and helped get it publicized on East Village Radio—a hip, community-oriented station that Kim describes as the heartbeat of downtown New York. Getting the event mentioned on the station gave it "some street cred, if you will," Kim says. She also had a contact at Pet Head, a manufacturer of high-end pet products, which donated items for Pup Crawl gift bags.

Pup Crawl organizers reached out to *The Bark* and *Doggie Aficionado* magazines for publicity. IAMS agreed to donate pet food to be distributed to local shelters. Volunteers designed a logo and set up and ran the website, which attracted about 30 additional volunteers.

Hassan recalls, "I got e-mails from people just saying, 'We heard about the Pup Crawl. How do we get involved? What can we do?'"

Kim adds, "We were amazed at how much support we were able to get from so many different avenues. We just kind of put all our feelers out there," utilizing Twitter and other social media.

Organizers needed a parade permit from the New York City Police Department to cross the bridge, as well as a permit from the city parks department for a pre-walk rally in nearby City Hall Park. That process took several months and posed the biggest logistical challenge for the Pup Crawl, despite helpful staffers in both departments, Hassan says.

On event day the weather was cloudy, but the sun emerged late in the afternoon as people gathered in the park. "It was like the gods were looking down on us," says Gottfried.

Hassan and Kim plan to stage another Pup Crawl in fall 2010. Any advice for a community thinking of doing something similar? "It might seem like a challenge, but it's definitely doable. Just start early with [acquiring] the permits," Hassan says. "If it can be done over the Brooklyn Bridge, I would hazard a guess that it can be done almost anywhere."

For information on the 2010 Brooklyn Bridge Pup Crawl, visit thepupcrawl.com or e-mail thepupcrawl@gmail.com.



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Next Time, Use the Door

Sometimes raptors make house calls. Luckily, so does wildlife rehabilitator Victor Collazo

Joan Fairman Kanes is used to taking pictures of wild animals in natural settings.

In her own home, not so much.

Kanes, a freelance photographer based in Haverford, Pa., a western suburb of Philadelphia, specializes in animal pictures, but her photography experiences couldn't have prepared her for a visitor who flew into town and crashed her pad, literally.

Last November, Kanes was driving home when she got a call from her husband, telling her that a large window in their dining room had been shattered, blasting shards of glass everywhere.

"And while we were talking, I said, 'Is there an animal in the house somewhere?' Because my first thought was something must have gone through the window and had probably been killed in doing so," Kanes says. "And he said, 'I don't see anything,' and he was walking around the house, talking on the phone, and then suddenly he said, 'Oh my God—there is a very large bird on top of a bookcase. It just flapped its wings.'"

It's never a good time for a large, wild bird to crash through your dining room window, and Kanes soon discovered that 6 p.m. Sunday is probably the worst time to try to find someone to come over and remove one from your home.

She got online and searched for wildlife rehabilitators in her area, trying to contact several of them, only to get voicemail messages. While she was leaving yet another message, a woman picked up the phone and, hearing about the situation, recommended that Kanes call Victor Collazo, who operates Skyking Raptor Rescue out of his home in Maple Glen, Pa.

Collazo, 44, is also affiliated with the wildlife rehabilitation clinic at the Schuykill Center for Environmental Education in Philadelphia, where he works with several types of raptors (a term that refers to birds of prey). He has trained at the Carolina Raptor Center in Huntersville, N.C., where he has earned certification in working with bald and golden eagles.

Kanes reached Collazo, and he arrived at her home in less than an hour. Using a spe-



JOAN FAIRMAN KANES

When it came time to release the hawk, raptor rehabilitator Victor Collazo took her back to the same neighborhood in Haverford, Pa.. The bird flew right to the high perch he'd hoped she would. Soon after, she flew off, followed by two adult red-tailed hawks Collazo took to be her parents.

cial, soft net designed to prevent injuries to birds—and heavy-duty gloves to protect him from the raptor's talons—Collazo quickly captured the feathered visitor. He soon identified her as a juvenile, female red-tailed hawk.

He examined her, looking for any blood or bits of glass in her feathers, and checking to make sure that her neck wasn't broken. Miraculously, the bird appeared unharmed. "She seemed OK; everything was fine," Collazo says. "She was a bit underweight. I believe she was trying to chase a bird [when she crashed through the window]."

Once Collazo had a firm grip on the bird's legs, he brought her out for Kanes to see. "I said, 'Do you mind if I take some pictures? This is killing me, because I'm a photographer,'" Kanes says, laughing at the memory. She was able to take a few shots without upsetting the animal.

Then Collazo put the hawk into a transport box and took her to his home, where he's set up for rehabilitation work. A more in-depth exam revealed no sign of bruises, broken bones, or injury to her beak or talons.

Collazo spent the next several days caring for the bird, giving her a high-calorie vitamin mix for hawks, as well as subcutane-

ous fluids. During this time, he moved her through a series of ever-larger flight enclosures, so that she would have room to start flying and regain muscle tone. "Our objective with raptors is the quicker we can get them back to the wild, the better it is for the bird," he says.

Less than a week after the hawk made her sudden appearance at the home of Kanes, Collazo transported her back to Kanes' neighborhood to release her. (Hawks are highly territorial; if he were to release her elsewhere, other raptors might attack her.)

And Kanes—ever the photographer—was there to witness the release, and got to take some pictures of Collazo releasing the beautiful bird.

She marvels at the fact that she was able to actually find a wildlife rehabilitator, especially one who specializes in raptors, in her area on a Sunday evening. "It's entirely possible I never would have found Victor. I don't know what I would have done," she says. "He's so full of information—he knows so much about hawks, and I found it absolutely fascinating."

To learn more about the wildlife rehabilitation clinic, go to schuykillcenter.org/departments/wildlife/. **AS**



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Parting the Waters

Out of Katrina's ruins, a haven emerges

Even before Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast in 2005, life for homeless pets in Louisiana's St. Bernard Parish was no day at the dog park.

The animal shelter was a ramshackle collection of trailers, outbuildings, and outdoor cages unprotected from the weather. By some accounts, it was also a warehouse for unwanted pets, badly understaffed, and constantly in need of basic repairs. There was no air conditioning to stave off the swampy Louisiana heat, and during winter cold snaps, only a few space heaters provided warmth.

Then came Katrina, leaving unimaginable destruction in its wake and forcing a mass exodus from the flooded parish where almost every home had become uninhabitable. For nearly two years, the shelter's main building lacked its own sources of electricity and running water, relying on wires and hoses from a Federal Emergency Management Agency trailer.

By the time Cathy Landry joined the shelter in September 2007, she was one of two people on the skeleton staff, handling cleaning and animal care while the director did everything else. "It was a nightmare. ... We had outside kennels where we had dogs housed, and they had to stay out all the time," says Landry, now the shelter's secretary. "The cats were in crates, and they were stacked three high."

But following an arduous road to recovery, the agency reached a milestone in January, opening a new facility that's nearly twice as large as its pre-Katrina operation. The \$1.25 million bill was footed by FEMA funds, insurance proceeds, and a \$250,000 grant and other in-kind assistance from The HSUS.

Now employing six people, St. Bernard can house twice the animals it once could—64 dogs and 30 cats. Dogs can move freely between indoor and outdoor runs, and they have a large play area and agility course. Separate ventilation systems help keep germs from sick animals away from the rest of the population.

"The community now has a place where they can go to adopt pets and find lost animals, as well as a place that they can be proud to call their animal shelter," says Melissa Seide Rubin, HSUS vice president for animal care centers and veterinary services.



The Jan. 11 grand opening of the St. Bernard Parish Animal Shelter in Violet, La., drew officials from The Humane Society of the United States, the ASPCA, the Louisiana SPCA, and the local government, as well as many visitors.



The Houndquarters building and new play area offer dogs plenty of room to roam; they can access exercise space through doggie doors in their kennels. They won't get muddy paws, once the grass starts growing.

The latest development in The HSUS's multimillion-dollar effort to help rebuild the Gulf Coast's animal services infrastructure, the relief package for the St. Bernard Animal Shelter includes joint funding (with the ASPCA) of its executive director po-

sition for three years. The purchase of a new \$80,000 transport vehicle, also jointly funded by The HSUS and the ASPCA, will help the shelter bring animals to more populated areas where they will have a better chance of adoption.

Survey Says ... Get a Cat!

Results reveal mixed perceptions of felines— and some surprising demographics

BY ARNA COHEN

As the human population has slowly regenerated—to about 60 percent of its pre-Katrina levels—so too has the number of pets. Those strays who survived the hurricane continued breeding, and many people who lost everything to the storm have not been able to afford services for their animals. With support from The HSUS, Louisiana State University veterinarians and veterinary students have helped address the problem by performing spay/neuter surgeries and providing general care at the shelter.

New executive director Beth Brewster is now helping guide the shelter's recovery. Before taking the job at St. Bernard Parish Animal Control in October 2008, Brewster served for three years as director of St. Tammany Humane Society, a private, not-for-profit shelter in Covington, La.

The Louisiana SPCA helped find the new executive director, according to Rubin. "[Brewster] was looking for a job, and she wanted a challenge. And boy, she got it," Rubin says, laughing. "Everyone thought she was wonderful; she had a very good reputation."

The building itself, though, is the jewel in the Mardi Gras crown. Brewster views the new Houndquarters facility as "paradise"—easier to clean, more comfortable for the animals, a more pleasant place for staff to work and people to visit.

Its grand opening is yet another affirmation that the hurricane-ravaged St. Bernard Parish is moving on, says parish president Craig Taffaro Jr. A four-year collaboration with local, state, and national organizations—including the Louisiana SPCA and the Arlene and Joseph Meraux Charitable Foundation—has fulfilled the parish's decade-long wish to modernize its animal services operations.

"You know the [saying] 'Every time a bell rings, an angel gets his wings'?" Taffaro asks. "That's what this is. Every time we cut a [grand-opening] ribbon, it's one more acknowledgement that our community is back. We are not going to be beaten by the storm." 



While cats are the most popular pet in the United States, there are still thousands in animal shelters waiting for loving homes. In an effort to boost cat adoptions and save lives, the Morris Animal Foundation, a non-profit that funds research studies to advance animal health and welfare, surveyed 1,102 non-cat owners about their perceptions of cats to gain insight into what may be preventing them from finding those homes. The results show that the next wave of cat owners may come from unexpected segments of society.

More cats than dogs live in American households today—93.6 million felines versus 77.5 million dogs. Yet the American Humane Association estimates that nearly three-quarters of cats who enter shelters are euthanized.

The Morris Foundation had been meeting with different groups concerned about cats, says Patricia Olson, D.V.M., the foundation's president and CEO. "It seemed that the pet industry was very interested in people who have cats to see if they could be persuaded to take one more. ... But I thought it would be fun for our foundation to gather some information about why people don't have them in the first place," she says.

The participants in the survey did not currently own cats, had never previously owned one, and had never previously considered owning one. Not surprisingly, more than half of the respondents had an overall negative attitude about felines, expressing concerns about their furniture scratching, hairball coughing, and counter jumping.

Other common concerns included the litter box smell, unprovoked biting, and a perception that cats couldn't get along with other pets. Nearly one-third of respondents said someone in the household was allergic to cats.

On the bright side, about 20 percent of respondents said they might consider a feline pet. What they liked best about cats was that they're playful, can entertain themselves, and make people smile. These respondents indicated that they would most likely adopt a cat from a shelter or rescue group.

Olson believes the pet industry should focus on this group. Many of the problems respondents identified can be readily addressed, she says, with solutions like behavioral training, scratching posts, and specific diets.

The most surprising results were the demographics of the 20 percent that would consider getting a cat. "If you asked me what population would be a good target, I would have said older women like myself," Olson says. "It turns out we didn't do so well!"

The survey instead found that 18-to-24-year-olds had a more positive attitude toward cats than older respondents. Singles, suburbanites, Hispanics, and men also responded more positively when compared to married participants, urban and rural residents, other ethnicities, and women, respectively—but according to the Morris Animal Foundation, very little marketing is being done to these groups.

"We who already have cats are 'low-hanging fruit,'" Olson says. "We're saying to the industry that they're missing a whole population out there who could be your next group of customers that could take care of these animals."

Based on the survey's results, the foundation posits that if just 10 percent of non-cat-owning households in the U.S. would consider adopting one, an additional 6.2 million cats could be placed in loving homes, greatly reducing the number in animal shelters.

For complete results of the survey, visit morriscatfoundation.org/cattitudes. 

[scoop]

MOUThPIECES)))

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It's nearly here, and that means you're nearly out of luck—that is, if you haven't registered for Expo yet!

The biggest, best, and most cost-effective conference and exhibit in animal care and control is coming up May 12-15. It's in Nashville, Tenn., this year, at the sumptuous Gaylord Opryland Resort—that's right next door to the Grand Ole Opry, which means you should be able to catch some great country music after you're done with the days of checking out the exhibitors, learning the latest approaches to

animal protection, and networking with your colleagues from across the country and around the world.

There's still time to register, and if you're worried about money (who isn't, these days?), check out *spaceshare.com/hsus_animal_care/*. By filling out a form, you can get matched with folks to carpool, taxi-share, or room with at the conference—which will help you save your moola for important things, like the cup of coffee you'll need to wake up early and take advantage of all the great workshops. You shouldn't miss the conference. Check out the details at *animalsheltering.org/expo* and make sure to stop by the *Animal Sheltering* booth at the exhibit hall to say hi! 

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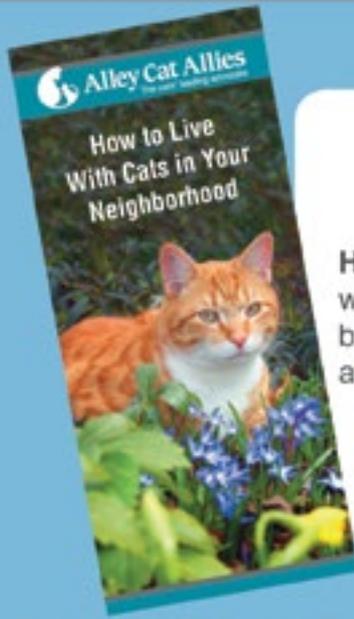
The poster here is one piece of the extensive campaign materials developed by The Humane

Society of the United States in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, designed to increase spay/neuter rates in Louisiana and Mississippi. The campaign is based on extensive research into pet owners' attitudes and behaviors on the issue. To read more about the campaign, check out the *Animal Sheltering* feature "Saving Lives in the Gulf Coast" from our July-Aug 2009 issue.

To view more of the campaign materials and download ads you can repurpose and brand with your own organization's branding and contact information, go to animalsheltering.org/spayneutercampaign.



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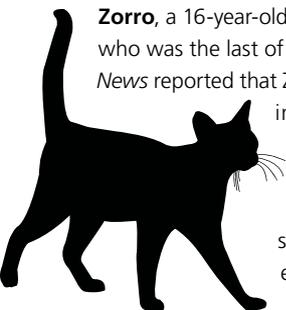
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Notable Numbers. Ripped from the pages of the *Guinness Book of World Records*: Longest kiss—31 hours, 30 minutes, 31 seconds. Loudest burp—107.1 decibels. Largest gathering of people dressed as gorillas—637. Ho-hum. For record-breaking with impact, check out the **Sacramento SPCA**. Its “lives saved in 2009” figures totally shredded all its previous years’ statistics. The high-volume spay/neuter clinic sterilized 16,422 animals; 6,059 pets were adopted out; 10,000 vaccinations were administered in low-cost clinics; and 1,200 sick or underage animals were cared for by dedicated foster families. And the shelter’s 1,300 volunteers voted the organization “Best Place to Volunteer” in *Sacramento* magazine.

■ **Goodnight, sweet prince.** The town of Newburyport, Mass., said goodbye on Dec. 9 to **Zorro**, a 16-year-old coal black shorthaired cat who was the last of his kin. The *Newburyport News* reported that Zorro was the sole remain-



ing resident of a colony of feral cats that had once numbered about 300; his passing, while sad, is a testament to the effectiveness of a well-managed trap-neuter-return program. In 1992,

a group of volunteers formed the **Merrimack River Feline Rescue Society** and undertook to control the colony humanely using TNR. Eighteen years later, the colony is gone, and the society has found homes for 14,600 pets, and spayed and neutered 7,700 ferals throughout Massachusetts and parts of New Hampshire. “Zorro was beautiful and a little spoiled—the volunteers gave him sardines on Sundays,” says **Maryellen Madaio**, MRRFS’ executive director. “We mourn his passing, but we focus on the success story that this project has been.”

■ **Well-heeled dog is no heel.** If you were a dog, and you won a million dollars, what would you do? Buy a diamond collar? Invest in hydrant-front property? When **Dr. Papidies**, a longhaired Chihuahua from Parker, Colo., won first prize in All American Pet Brands’ “Cutest Dog” contest, he did

neither. *Peoplepets.com* reports that he instructed his person, dermatologist **Leslie Capin**, to donate it all to his brothers and sisters at two area animal shelters, the **Dumb Friends League** in Denver and the **Max Fund**. The pooch was a gift to Capin from a well-meaning friend who had unknowingly purchased him from a puppy mill; he became deathly ill within days and was diagnosed with Addison’s disease. The kennel was subsequently investigated and shut down, and Capin has become a staunch opponent of puppy mills. Now 3 years old, the pooch knows he’s one lucky dog and is thrilled to be sharing his wealth. As he “writes” on his owner’s blog, “With the downturn in our economy many of my furry friends are finding themselves homeless. I along with my Mom am passionate about helping these animals!”

■ **Where there’s a will.** Last fall, a letter arrived at the **Wenatchee Valley Humane Society** in Wenatchee, Wash., from a financial institution with the news that their client, 92-year-old **Helen Zilke**, had recently passed away and bequeathed some money to the shelter. Interim director **Stephanie Manriquez** sent in the required form and received a check for \$87,000. A really nice windfall, especially coming from someone who had never set foot in the shelter. But it didn’t end there. Check after check arrived, totaling \$340,000. Then, in January of this year, Manriquez, now the shelter’s permanent director, was called by Zilke’s attorney and told that the humane society would be receiving another \$800,000. “It was stunning,” Manriquez recalls. “None of the staff had ever met her, and we knew very little about her.” She says Zilke’s daughters told her their mother adored animals and that every year at Christmas, they would drive her to the shelter to make a donation, usually about \$50 or \$100. But she just couldn’t bring herself to go in, finding it too upsetting to see the homeless animals. The money couldn’t have come at a better time—the society was planning a capital campaign to raise funds to replace its 1970s-era facility, which has no central heat

or air conditioning, no isolation areas for sick or frightened pets, and inadequate space for cats. “We serve two counties in a rural area where the population has grown 80 percent in the last 30 years,” says Manriquez. “But our space hasn’t grown at all. We’re so thankful to Mrs. Zilke and her family.”



■ **Help in Haiti.** Jerry’s a hero, but he doesn’t care. All he wants is a toy and a pat on the head. Trained to sniff out survivors of disasters, the **3-year-old black Lab** arrived in Haiti as part of the Orange County Federal Emergency Management Agency Urban Search and Rescue team after the devastating January earthquake crippled the island nation. A CNN clip shows Jerry and a canine partner racing over a rubble heap, barking whenever they sense the presence of a living human in the debris. According to the clip, the **National Disaster Search Dog Foundation** discovered Jerry at a shelter, where his energy level and high-strung personality had kept him from being adopted. The foundation turned those negatives into one great big paws-itive. Jerry and his fellow sniffer take 10 minutes to clear a pile of ruins that would otherwise take a team of 80 people equipped with cameras and listening equipment two hours to search. There are currently 70 SDF-trained search teams in five states and Washington, D.C., who respond to national and international requests for search assistance.

■ **Turnabout is fair play.** In 2003, **Miami-Dade Animal Services** was in terrible shape. Run by the police department, the unit was the subject of so many complaints that the Miami-Dade County Manager’s Office and Office of the Inspector General called **The HSUS** for help. Last November, the shelter and staff received three



awards from the **Florida Animal Control Association** for its work, including being named 2009 Animal Control Agency of the Year. The difference? An evaluation by a team of HSUS shelter services consultants, the hiring of a dedicated director, and a lot of hard work. In 2005, **Sara Pizano**, D.V.M., was brought on board to address the 578 recommendations made by the evaluation team. "There were thousands of animals missing, a very high disease and mortality rate in the kennels, no sanitation procedures in place," and a 30 percent vacancy rate on the staff, says Pizano. She created a new management team, which wrote and implemented standard operating procedures for every area of the shelter and started holding people accountable. The raised standards of care as well as the establishment of a volunteer program and formal relationships with area rescue groups have greatly increased the number of animal lives saved. In 2004, the shelter adopted out 3,000 animals; in 2008-09, 8,300 found new homes, and rescue groups took another 4,000. "Knowing where we started ... it's an astonishing accomplishment and honor to get that award after four years," Pizano says, who adds that the local community is equally excited about the recognition that the shelter has received.

Take this stamp and stick it. Who can say no to a pair of sparkling eyes in a furry face? No one we know. And that's what the **U.S. Postal Service** hopes. To encourage people to consider adopting their next pet from a shelter, in April, USPS is introducing a set of first-class stamps featuring 10 irresistible shelter cats and dogs and the slogan "Animal Rescue: Adopt a Shelter Pet." The photos were taken by photographer **Sally Andersen-Bruce**, who found the cuties in facilities near her home in New Milford, Conn. And, happily, all but one had been spoken for at the time they sat for their portraits. **AS**

THE U.S. POSTAL SERVICE



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"Halo's the best stuff you can get - just look at the ingredients!"

Ellen

Ellen DeGeneres,
Animal Advocate,
Co-Owner, Halo







How does your organization handle naming adoptable animals? Who does it? Are any names forbidden? Do any names seem to have more appeal to adopters?

That was the question we asked you for this issue's Coffee Break, and you responded with a roll call of great names, some funny, some sweet. To see more of your answers—including a terrific one from Emily Abrahamson of KittyKind in New York, which we loved but couldn't fit!—go to animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak.



The foster parents name their foster kittens. Many use TV shows (Leonard, Sheldon and Penny from *The Big Bang Theory*), singing groups (John, Paul, George, and Ringo), movies (Butch and Sundance), a name that fits the cat (Bobby for a bobtail, Calli for calicos, Cinnamon for Siamese, Domino for black and white). Or they name them with a theme in mind: the French duo Babette and Pierre, presidential candidates Barack and Hillary, or football players Eli and Peyton Manning. ... We encourage people not to name them anything that would give someone a negative impression of the kitten (such as Crybaby for a kitten that meows a lot).

—Julie Bowen, volunteer
*Friends of Jefferson Animal Shelter
Metairie, Louisiana*

Several years ago we started assigning a letter of the alphabet to each month, so that all the animals that come in to the shelter on any given month have a name that starts with the same letter. This helps us to know right away approximately how long an animal has been with us, and it's fun too. There are websites dedicated to dog names. My favorite is dooziedog.com. I print the list and cross off all the undesirable names such as Kujo, Hurricane, and Fangs and the much-overused names such as Bella, Oreo, Lady, and King. We also retire the names of the animals who had to be euthanized for behavioral or health reasons (we are a no-kill shelter). Try it!

—Manon Fortier, vice president
*Sullivan County SPCA
Rock Hill, New York*

Naming cats is one of the few chances we get to be a little goofy in our work, so we run with it! Sometimes we go with themes—like types of cheese (Gouda, Velveeta, Dubliner, etc.) or cereals (Sugar Pops, Froot Loops, Lucky Charms, etc.)—for litters of kittens or large groups of cats. Much of the time the themes are food-related, but we did once name 52 cats from a hoarding situation after different types of fish and other sea creatures (Manta, Trout, Abalone, Snook, etc.). Sometimes a cat just “speaks” to us and says, “Hi, I’m George,” and that’s that—and sometimes we’re just feeling downright silly, and so we end up with names like Princess Prickle Paws, Gobbles, Fangus (who had his teeth pulled and is now Fangless!), or a litter of kittens called Measles, Mumps, and Rubella!

—Liz Pease, director of operations
*Merrimack River Feline Rescue Society
Salisbury, Massachusetts*

The staff here at MCAR really takes pride and enjoyment in picking out names for our animals. Sometimes we have themes with litters. Some of our favorites have been TV shows (*Friends*, *The Brady Bunch*, *Peanuts*, *Andy Griffith*, etc.) musicians (Lynyrd Skynyrd, Jim Morrison, Pink Floyd) and even Greek mythology. We try to keep a list of names handy that we get from baby- or pet-naming websites. We also keep a baby name book on hand. We like to name pets according to the time of year they are brought in. We like to use reindeer names at Christmas and names like Heart and Cupid near Valentine's Day. Sometimes if we are super-busy we grab the Yellow Pages or a newspaper and borrow names from there. We almost always give hound dogs country names like Conway, Banjo, Loretta, and our

favorite, Moonshine. We have learned that names like Angel, Sweetie, and Baby are just bad luck. They never live up to the expectations of those names!

—Amber Lowery, kennel technician
Mitchell County Animal Rescue
Spruce Pine, North Carolina

Because Indianapolis is obsessed with sports, we often name animals in conjunction with major sporting events. The Colts were undefeated for much of the season, and we have a litter of puppies named after key players (Peyton, Freeney, etc.)—they'll be adopted in no time at all! Our biggest fundraiser, Mutt Strut, is held at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway's world-famous track just before the Indy 500, so we've named dogs and cats after drivers, makes of cars, and other things associated with racing. We avoid using names associated with "bad" connotations (Cujo, Killer, Capone, Vick), and do our best to name the animals affectionately. ... With all our animals, we try to carefully consider their names to represent them in the best light.

—Tristan Schmid, director of communications and marketing
Humane Society of Indianapolis
Indianapolis, Indiana

I like to handle the animal and then pick a name that seems to fit his/her temperament. I prefer to choose names that people can pronounce with ease. I have gone to seminars where they say unique names help adoptions, but what I have found is unique, yes, but hard to pronounce, no. I like to keep track of the names used in a year, and I pay attention to the black dog who gets looked at first to see what kind of name he/she had. You would be surprised that some of the repetitive names we dread actually help the animal get adopted. People remember a pet they had as a child with a common name and are drawn to the animal with that name, like Shadow, Oreo, and Whiskers. We change names of animals who come in with undesirable names such as Killer and Cocaine. They quickly become Miller and Cain.

—Maggie Skovera, rescue/transfer coordinator
Countryside Humane Society
Racine, Wisconsin

One of the vets we work with suggested what we now call our "Veterinary Memorial Program." When a patient at his clinic dies, they send us the name/address of the owners, the name of the pet, and we send a card in the pet's honor, notifying them that the vet has made a donation to our facility in memory of their pet. We also send info on grief counseling and a note that tells them we're going to use their pet's name to name an animal in our shelter in the near future. This provides us with a fresh, new list of names to choose from—and we find some of the people go on our website to find the namesake of their pet, and find a new one to adopt! While some names seem to appeal to certain adopters, I think that is a very personal and unpredictable thing. We try to avoid recycling derogatory names.

—Monica Gates, operations manager
Humane Society of Waupaca County
Waupaca, Wisconsin

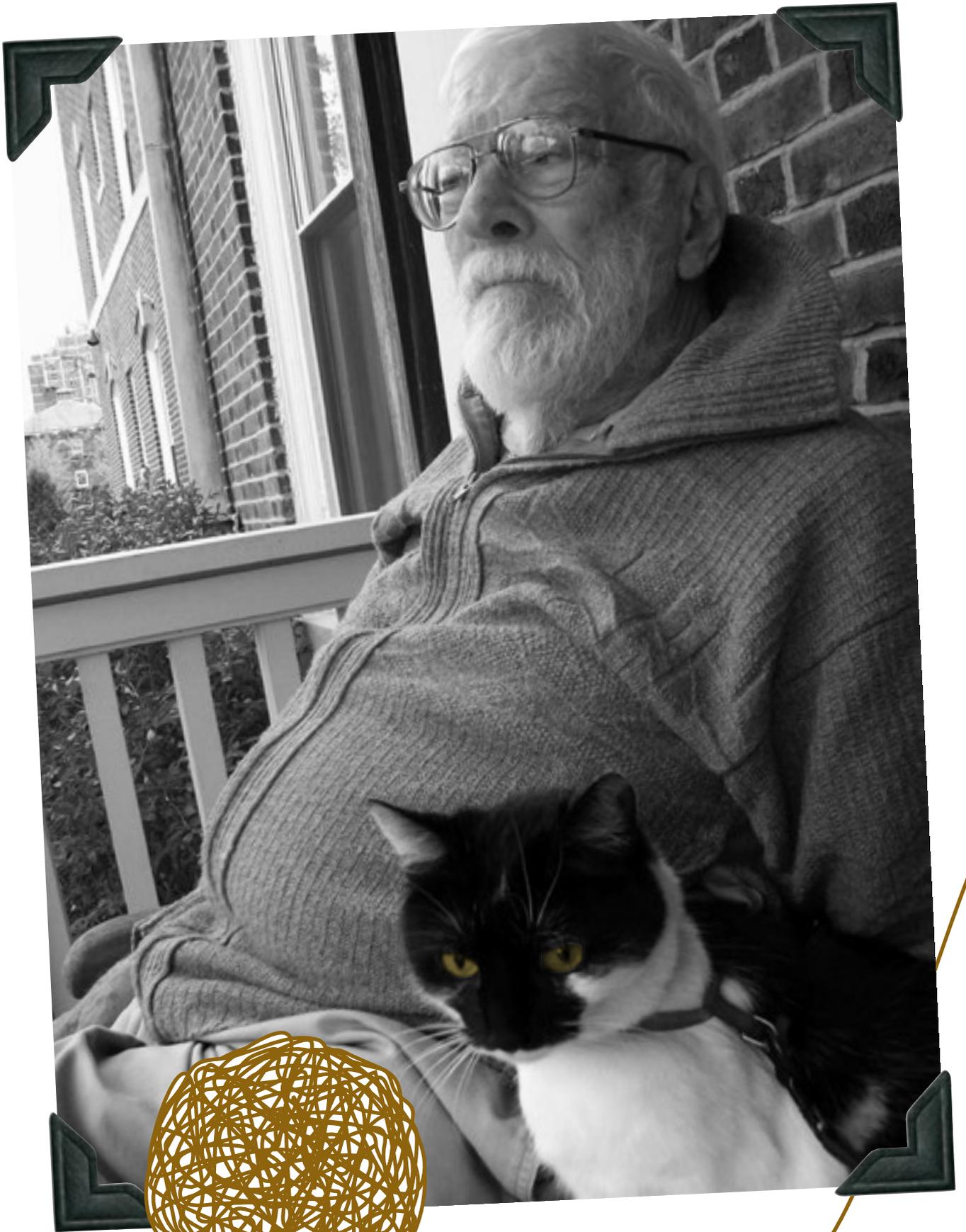
Name choices are all about connecting with potential adopters. We often choose themes for litters or groups of new animals, which spark interest when adopters recognize the reference or feel a connection with the theme. Examples include: sections of the orchestra (brass, strings, winds, drums) or Flintstone characters (Fred, Barney, Wilma, Betty). We've also done TV show characters, superheroes, herbs, presidents, months of the year, and reindeer. This helps us keep track of litters, and it often draws potential owners into considering a particular animal for another moment. Another easy source is a simple reference to the area where the animal was found—a street, subdivision, park, school, or forest can make for a recognizable name with local flavor. We also collect name suggestions from local elementary students. The students make lists of name suggestions, which are often imaginative and very unique!

—Katie Mehle, director of public relations and outreach
Pet Helpers
Charleston, South Carolina

Animal Sheltering congratulates Katie Mehle of Charleston, S.C., whose submission was selected in a random drawing from those published in this issue. Her organization, Pet Helpers, will receive a free coffee break: a \$50 gift certificate to a local coffee shop. "Bone" appetit!

How does your organization make its facilities more appealing to the public? Do you decorate your lobby? Deodorize your kennels? Disguise ugly parts of the building?

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





Reaching Out to the Senior Community

Older and wiser, the retirement set can be great resource for shelters—and vice versa

BY DEBBIE SWANSON

James Jenkins, 91 years old, waits for his guests in his front yard, supporting himself with a cane. His two loyal dogs hover around, enjoying the day while keeping a watchful eye on their owner.

No longer able to drive, Jenkins relies on SHARE (Special Human-Animal Relationships), a Marin Humane Society program that assists homebound pet owners. Jenkins and other clients receive regular deliveries of donated dog and cat food, vet care assistance, basic pet medications—and a little friendly company. When the staff from Marin pull into the driveway, Jenkins lights up.

“The pets are part of their family—sometimes the only family they have nearby—and without this help, these owners may not be able to keep their pets,” says Carrie Harrington, communications manager for the Novato, Calif., shelter.

Keeping animals in their homes is what the SHARE program is all about. Needs vary with each situation, but eligible clients—typically seniors on a limited income, or HIV/AIDS patients living at home—receive deliveries of pet food, help with litter box cleaning or dog walking, or just routine well-being checks. Currently, the program assists approximately 250 area pet owners.

“The goal is to keep people and pets together,” Harrington says. “Some owners can take care of their pets, but are just physically unable to do certain things, like clean a litter box.” Others who are unable to drive to stores to get food and supplies depend on the deliveries to maintain their household.

SHARE began providing home visits to eligible homebound pet owners in 1987, in memory of Erica Ettinger. An animal lover concerned with the fate of homeless animals, by third grade Erica had already organized a fundraiser for Marin and visited a convalescent home with her own dog, Marcy. When a tragic bike accident took her life at age 8, the memorial funds that poured in in her name were used to continue her efforts and finance the SHARE program.

SHARE originally offered pet-assisted therapy to convalescent centers, but now provides a variety of services designed to keep animals and owners together. The program received national recognition in 1989, when it received a model program award from the Delta Society, a nonprofit that uses animal-assisted therapy to improve human health.

Considering a similar program at your shelter? “Don’t hesitate to reach out,” Harrington says. Other local groups and social service agencies—the Salvation Army, hospice

and elder visitation groups, Meals on Wheels—can become valuable partners. That kind of external assistance has been vital for Marin. “It would be nearly impossible to do it alone. Community support, as well as forming networks with other community-based organizations, has made this program possible.”

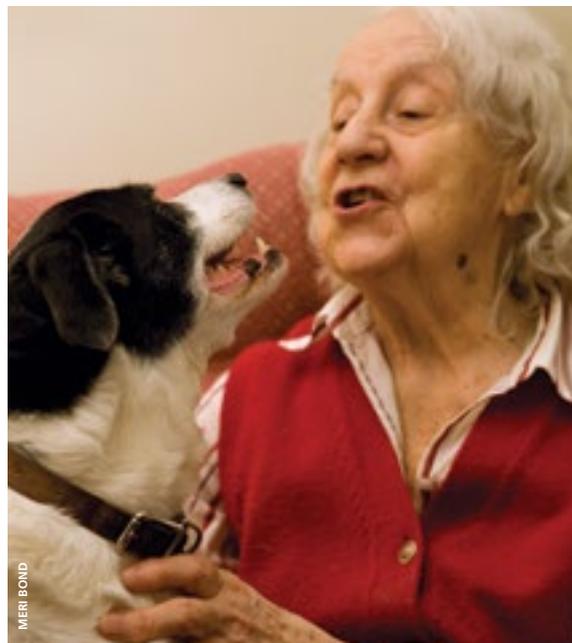
Harrington also credits the success of the program to Marin’s supporters. “Our holiday drive brings in a big portion of our donations of time and goods. Volunteer groups come in and put together gift bags for clients, and we have cookies and try to make it festive.”

Seniors and Animals: A Good Mix

With Americans living longer and healthier lives, senior citizens make up a larger portion of the population. Many have pets; many who don’t might benefit from their company.

Several ‘90s-era studies reported on the benefit pets bring to the elderly. A study published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* reported that senior citizens who owned cats or dogs maintained a higher level of physical and social activity, experienced less depression, and were more tolerant of social isolation. Animals have also been credited with comforting those with Alzheimer’s and other memory-impairment disorders. These effects were noted in a 1999 study in the *Journal of Psychological Nursing and Mental Health Services*, which demonstrated that dogs could soothe patients who experienced increased anxiety toward the end of the day.

And while less-mobile older people may need assistance with caring for their animals, many active, healthy seniors



When screening canine candidates for senior outreach programs, it’s good to look for dogs who are calm, attentive to their owners, and like attention. It can also be helpful to test a dog’s reaction to things like buzzers, loud voices, and dropped items to see how he reacts.

may be an untapped resource of potential adopters, supporters, and volunteers for your organization.

With more free time and more routine lifestyles, senior adults living on their own can often provide great foster or permanent homes for shelter pets. “Some of the best homes are with seniors because they often have the most time for socializing—which is frequently what the animal needs,” says Holly McArthur, director of marketing and development at Pet’s Lifeline Animal Shelter in Sonoma, Calif. “Animal companionship of all types is about good matches. Age, per se, is rarely a determining factor.”

McArthur has found that mature cats often make ideal companions for senior citizens—a bonus, since they’re often overlooked by younger families seeking more active felines.

Pet’s Lifeline has reached out to seniors with mobile adoption events, seniors-for-senior animal programs, and reduced adoption fees. The shelter also welcomes seniors as foster parents, particularly for older animals and those with special needs. These potential owners go through the same screening and educational process anyone else would, McArthur says.

Some seniors may be excellent pet owners, but have limited transportation options—they may find it hard to get in to the shelter to check out available companions. Organizations can help by seeking ways to overcome those obstacles. Encourage staff and volunteers to regularly identify animals who seem more suited to a senior owner, and organize ways to bring those animals to the attention of potential owners—for example, by planning a senior spotlight day, running a mobile adoption event at a nearby retirement community, highlighting senior pets on your website, or making prearranged home visits.



Visits from pets bring happiness to residents of assisted living centers, and the animals seem to enjoy them, too. Socialized pets who are prepared for such duties are typically delighted by the extra attention and caresses.

Staff involved in the SHARE program at Marin often bring pets to meet potential owners. “Some clients want another cat or dog, but can’t get in to the shelter. If staff see a dog or cat with the right temperament, they’ll arrange to bring them to visit the homebound potential owner,” says Harrington.

Share an Animal Bond

Bringing joy to others is a driving motivation for many of those who participate in senior outreach programs. When Eileen Weinberg adopted a docile dachshund mix, Phoebe, from Save a Sato—an organization that helps place Puerto Rican street dogs in homes—she wanted to give the pup a happier life. And she also wanted a pet who would help to spread some happiness to others.

“The elder community is a community that’s lost ... they really need the visitation,” says Weinberg.

At first, though, Weinberg wasn’t sure the shy dog would be a success as a visitor.

“Two trainers told me it wouldn’t happen—she was too skittish ...” said Weinberg. But she didn’t give up on her new friend. “I brought her to a behaviorist, and after seven months of training, brought Phoebe to PetPals.”

Phoebe passed the required screening, and soon she and her adopted mom began visiting residents of a Boston-area nursing home through the PetPals program, run by FriendshipWorks. The group collaborates with the Animal Rescue League of Boston to organize volunteer visits at nursing homes.

Phoebe seems to be a natural at charming the residents. “One person doesn’t really like to pet Phoebe, so she sits at my feet and lets that person look. For others, she’ll jump right up on their bed. She’s very intuitive about who likes what, and behaves accordingly,” says Weinberg. “The residents love her—she’s like a rock star walking through the halls.”

Many assisted living facilities don’t allow residents to keep pets, but will be more than happy to entertain well-behaved four-legged visitors from time to time. Animals are a natural morale booster, and can bring a burst of wagging (or sometimes purring) joy to senior centers, and a special pleasure to those residents who may miss their own pets. Animal visitors can serve as icebreakers, and often draw out the residents who keep to their rooms, and inspire the quieter residents to start conversing about their own past beloved pets.

Northeast Animal Shelter in Salem, Mass., has been bringing animals and seniors together for several years. “It began when one employee brought her two dogs to visit an assisted living center. It went so well that soon another employee joined in, and it grew to include volunteers from the community,” says executive director Randi Cohen. “Now we have a full-time volunteer who organizes our program.”

Typical visits involve an animal-owner pair and one resident of an assisted living center, or one or two animal-



Krowka, a 5-year-old kitty owned by the photographer, makes weekly visits to residents of the Cambridge Homes, where she is greeted with open arms.

owner pairs making the rounds at a group gathering in a facility’s social hall.

Picking and Choosing

While shelter behaviorists and volunteers may be perfect matches for running senior outreach programs, shelter pets are often another story.

Cohen and other experts say that bringing shelter pets as visitors to nursing homes can be risky. It’s difficult to be sure about an animal’s true personality based on a limited stay in a shelter, and there may be some safety and liability issues for those animals whose personalities, likes, and dislikes aren’t known quantities. Instead, at Northeast, pets owned by staff members or community volunteers make the visits, serving as representatives of the shelter.

Animals who’ve been adopted from the shelter and been in their homes for a while can make ideal participants. That mellow basset hound mix who went home with the cheerful 20-something with the great smile? That highly social, affectionate cat who could never get enough of meeting new people? They may be perfect candidates; a shelter’s adopters and active supporters may serve as a great recruiting pool for organizations looking to start a senior visiting program.

Cohen can’t say enough about the rewards. “Shelters are all about finding homes for animals, but it’s also about the



A Bird with Purpose

Most people have heard about dogs visiting nursing homes, but they're not the only creatures capable of spreading the love.

Indy, a dusky conure, was picked up by the Animal Rescue League of Boston when he was found on the streets talking to passersby.

When no owner surfaced, Debbie Vogel, the League's volunteer manager, adopted the bird. Since he loves to talk, Vogel thought he would be a great addition to the PetPals program, and Indy soon signed on for visitations.

"Indy frequently visits an adult day health program. He loves to watch the men playing dominoes, and asks them, 'What are you doing?'" says Ellen Kirchheimer, program director. "They'll stop what they're doing, and answer him. His family may be tired of answering him all the time, but the seniors he visits are ready to answer Indy's question!"

In addition to chatting, Indy amuses his audience by barking, imitating phones, alarms, and microwaves, reports Vogel. He also enjoys being handled. His trimmed wings keep his flying to a minimum, a safety precaution designed to prevent a repeat of his earlier wandering ways.

Indy has developed a following of fans, and has even flapped his way into the hearts of many devout dog lovers. He'll even treat listeners to an occasional "Let's go, Red Sox!"

community and humane education," she says. "It's just a nice feeling to do this and make the seniors happy."

And while the visits bring happiness to the residents, the animals enjoy them as well. Most dogs will rise to the occasion when they sense they have a job to do, and the socialized pets who are best prepared for such duties are usually delighted by the extra attention and caresses.

Careful screening of the people and animal participants who are representing your organization is important. Ellen Kirchheimer, program director of PetPals, encourages running a background check and contacting references for the owner, and collecting health records for the animal. Once that's satisfactory, you can set up a meeting with the owner, and then with the owner and pet together.

With dogs, Kirchheimer suggests, look for one who's attentive to his owner, not too exuberant or easily stressed, and one who seeks people and enjoys attention.

"Make sure the dog will tolerate things like wheelchairs and other stresses," says Kirchheimer, who's helped screen numerous prospective canine and feline visitors. Test dogs' reaction to things such as buzzers, loud voices, and dropped items. Also think from a dog's perspective: for example, some brands of walkers have a tennis ball at the base of each strut for padding. "We've had dogs, particularly Labs, who want to go after the tennis balls," she says.

While cats can make visits too, the nature of kitty stress can make it more challenging. Whereas most dogs like nothing better than a ride in the car, most cats would do almost anything to avoid one. After a drive, even the most cuddly lap cat may be in no mood for visiting.

Some cats can recuperate quickly and do their duty, though. "We had a gentleman who brought his cat, and at first the cat was a bit stressed from the transport, but then the cat seemed to get used to it," says Kirchheimer. Kitty participants should be tolerant of travel, accepting of a harness, and not inclined to jump, swat, or scratch.

Once you've completed your screening, educate the new visitors. Conduct one-on-one or small-group training sessions that newcomers must attend prior to going out on the road. Describe a typical visit, how long it should be, what to do and not to do, and the types of residents they should expect to encounter. Review your organization's methods for dealing with potential problems, such as difficulty handling a pet, medical issues the seniors may be facing and procedures for dealing with a medical emergency, and guidelines for canceling visits, should either member of the visiting team be ill. Your experienced visitors can be a great pool of information; tap into their knowledge and invite them to assist with training.

After completing their education process, consider initially sending the new pair of visitors out with a more experienced pair. This helps newcomers learn the ropes, and the experienced visitor can provide feedback and advice if



GILLIAN HERSH/MARIN HUMANE SOCIETY

SHARE (Special Human-Animal Relationships), a program of the Marin Humane Society, helps homebound, elderly people keep pets in their homes. SHARE client Mimi Slama enjoys the comfort of her devoted companion, Misty.



Many dogs like nothing better than a ride in the car, but most cats loathe such a trip. But Krowka, visiting with residents at the Cambridge Homes in Cambridge, Mass., seems to have completely forgotten how she got there.

needed. Then follow up with the newcomers to answer any questions and get their impressions.

“I’ve read a lot of the studies,” says Kirchheimer, “but witnessing a pet visitation in a nursing home brings the studies to life. These people perk up and come alive when an animal visits. It’s just amazing to witness.”

Back and Forth

Animals can go visit seniors, but seniors can come visit them in the shelter, too. Northeast Animal Shelter occasionally invites nursing home residents to stop by and meet some of the shelter animals. For this type of visit, carefully selected shelter pets are brought out to interact with the guests.

“Puppies seem to work best,” says Cohen. “We’ve had groups of Alzheimer’s patients come visit, and they just love the puppies. These are people that might not smile all day otherwise.”

Meeting people is good for the puppies, too, who gain exposure to a variety of people and situations, an important step in their early socialization.

When bringing visitors in, be sure to have staff on hand to assist with the animals. Inquire ahead of time if the visitors have any special circumstances or any preferences—meeting cats versus dogs, for example—and have an empty office or conference room ready in case a visitor needs a break from the animals.

As the country grows grayer, it’s smart for any animal welfare organization to figure out how to reach out to elders, both those who need company and assistance, and those who are eager to spend their golden years helping others. Outreach and visitation programs, promotion of adoptable animals to senior communities—all of these provide great opportunities for companionship, goodwill, and community involvement, and may help you find more homes for the many cats and dogs who deserve their own happy retirement. 

Resources

For helpful guidelines on nursing home visit:

- [avma.org/issues/policy/animal_assisted_guidelines.asp](https://www.avma.org/issues/policy/animal_assisted_guidelines.asp).
- The Delta Society (deltasociety.org)

NEBRASKA

the
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HOME OF BREED AMBASSADORS

An Unexpected Truth

In Nebraska, one shelter's strategy for coping with breed-specific legislation saves lives

BY VAL POULTON

Because Omaha has a problem with dogfighting, when I started with the Nebraska Humane Society (NHS) five years ago, we had a policy not to adopt out pit bulls or pit bull mixes. Concerned for the safety of our citizens who might adopt a pit bull or pit bull mix of questionable background, and fearing that one of our dogs could end up used for fighting, we did not place any dog who looked like he *might* be a pit bull mix. Thus, a dog with “pitty features” would likely be euthanized.

But dogfighting decreased dramatically in our community. According to Mark Langan, our vice president of field operations, after a police-assisted 2005 investigation of an Omaha-based dogfighting operation resulted in the main player being indicted on federal drug charges, many other dogfighting participants fled Nebraska. In 2006, we began offering a \$10,000 reward for information leading to the bust of a dogfight in progress. While we haven't paid it out, it's publicized frequently, and Mark believes it's caused a slowdown in dogfighting.

In the wake of the decrease in fighting activity, the staff of our behavior department was confident that we could evaluate individual animals' behavior and find safe and stable dogs to offer for adoption to responsible owners. In 2007, we pulled together a task force to investigate the challenges and identify the pros and cons of adding pit bulls and pit bull mixes to our adoption program.

The task force contacted pit bull advocacy groups and shelters that included pit bulls in their adoption programs, and we ended up with a special adoption program for pit bulls. Interested parties could pre-apply, and if, after a background check, we were comfortable with adopting to them, we would find them a dog. In the early days of the program in 2007, we adopted out two pit bulls. It was more difficult to find interested adopters than it was to find adoptable dogs, but this may have been due to an overall lack of familiarity with the program.

Tragic Misdirection

Then in 2008, something terrible happened: A local child was mauled by a dog who was identified as a pit bull. Those

of us who work in this field would recognize there were several factors in the care and keeping of this dog—he was intact, and spent his days tethered in a backyard where he was frequently teased by neighbor children—that made him a bite risk. His breed was the least of these factors, but the media and the public grabbed on to the dog's breed identification and ignored the circumstances.

The mauling led to a push for a breed ban, threatening to undo all the work we'd put into trying to find a safe way to place some of these dogs. In the end, we managed to avoid a ban, but we do now have breed-specific legislation. (Don't think it will never happen to you!)

In October 2008, the city council passed a breed-specific muzzling ordinance. Beginning January 2009, all “pit bulls” were required to be muzzled and harnessed when outside a securely fenced area. At the Nebraska Humane Society, we were dismayed that we would be dealing with breed-specific ordinances—but there has been an interesting twist to this unfortunate event.

When the ordinance was passed, it defined “pit bull” as “... any dog that is an American Pit Bull Terrier, American Staffordshire Terrier, Staffordshire Bull Terrier, Dogo Argentino, Presa Canario, Cane Corso, American Bulldog, or any dog displaying the majority of physical traits of any one or more of the above breeds (more so than any other breed), or any dog exhibiting those distinguishing characteristics which substantially conform to the standards established by the American Kennel Club or United Kennel Club for any of the above breeds.”

Accordingly, those dogs that physically *appear* to be primarily pit bull (and according to the city, that includes several breeds, including some mastiffs) must be muzzled, harnessed, and follow other breed-specific rules.

Sweetening Bitter Medicine

To make the new ordinance more bearable, we proposed a program that allows dogs to “test out” of the muzzling requirement. When a “majority” pit bull passes a Canine Good Citizen test administered by NHS, he trades his muzzle for a Breed Ambassador vest. The dog must retest and pass annually



to keep his ambassador status. As of December 2009, 53 pit bulls have passed the test and become Breed Ambassadors.

We also proposed (and Omaha adopted) revisions to the city's dangerous-dog ordinance. The city also accepted our recommendations to add a "potentially dangerous" citation (one that's based on a particular dog's behavior history, not on his breed), a reckless-owner citation, and an ordinance

We could have come up with reason after reason not to promote pit bull mixes and "majority" pit bulls for adoption. ... But we have used the legislation to move forward and promote this often neglected and abused breed, and provide our community with a program that helps make the dogs safer.

that restricts tethering to no more than 15 minutes. Thus we managed to get a good tethering law in on the heels of an ordinance that at first seemed to have no silver lining.

These revisions are aimed at changing the other end of the leash, promoting awareness that irresponsible pet owners are a large part of the problem. We feel that these revisions to the breed-specific part of the city's ordinances have brought public attention to responsible pet ownership. One indicator that it's working has been a sharp increase in our licensing compliance.

As we were working through the issues of identifying dogs who fit the ordinance's definition, we began to contemplate whether any dog who seemed less than a "majority" pit bull was really a pit bull. So many breeds of dogs share physical traits with animals mentioned in the ordinance, how could we know that this dog with "pitty features" actually had any pit bull in him at all?

We approached our board of directors about considering placements for those dogs identified as having pitty features, but whom we identified as being less than "majority" pit bull. The dogs would have to pass behavior and medical evaluations in order to be offered for adoption. The board agreed.

We did so well with adopting out these "minority" pit bulls and "All-Americans" (our term for dogs with such mixed heritage that we couldn't venture a guess) that we again approached our board, this time about considering "majority" pit bulls for adoption.

A Promise Kept

Again, the BOD agreed, and in October 2009 we adopted out our first. Her name is Promise, and she was adopted out with the required muzzle and harness and free classes. Under the ordinance, she is not allowed to visit the local dog park, so she comes to our staff dog play groups on Sundays.

Before we began adopting out pit bulls, we anticipated some major problems. We were concerned that no one in our community would adopt them, and that their behavior might deteriorate while they were waiting for new homes.

But interestingly, at the end of 2009, the average length of stay in adoption for our pit bulls/mixes was shorter than average for dogs overall. Promise was in the adoption area for only two days before finding her family. Her adopter had been so excited we had a pit bull available for adoption that he came in just to see her, just to see if it was true. This man had no intention of adopting Promise (now named Simi)—that is, until he met her. She gets along famously with his resident pit bull mix.

Our experience with this man showed us what we'd known already: Local pit bull lovers were well-aware of what had previously happened when one came to NHS—euthanasia—and they were now ecstatic about the new opportunities for these dogs in Omaha.



Promise, now named Simi (right), cuddles up with her buddy in her new home.

As a result of the breed-specific legislation, we could have come up with reason after reason not to promote pit bull mixes and “majority” pit bulls for adoption. And heaven knows the local media continues to give our citizens reasons not to adopt them—the coverage of pit bull behavior continues to be focused on the breed rather than the other factors that could make any dog a bite risk. But we have



Val Poulton is vice president of behavior and placement at the Nebraska Humane Society. The photos on the wall behind her honor dogs who are part of the shelter’s Breed Ambassador program.

used the legislation to move forward and promote this often neglected and abused breed, and provide our community with a program that helps make the dogs safer.

I’m proud of my shelter for taking a stand and trusting there are people in our community who will step up and do the right thing for these dogs. I am equally proud of those in my community who demonstrate that trust is deserved. **AS**

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[Shelter Partners]



A Tribute to Mutts

Like snowflakes, each one is unique—and never to be seen again

BY CARRIE ALLAN

When I walk our dog around the neighborhood, I often see a springer spaniel curled up on his front porch with his family. There's a Pomeranian who lives a couple of blocks over, and a set of miniature dachshunds who greet us by howling, hurtling off their front steps, and flinging themselves at the fence like low-slung ninjas.

There are several glossy golden retrievers, and in the early fall evenings, they promenade with their people, their coats shining in the last of the day's light.

Often I stop to chat with these fellow walkers. The conversation, of course, is mostly about the creatures at the end of our leashes.

"What a beautiful poodle!" I will say to a young mom and her daughter, as their dog prances proudly at their side.

"Oh—thanks!" the mom will answer and, seeking to respond in kind, will glance admiringly toward my feet to meet the eyes of our chubby little pooch, Coltrane. "Your ... dog ... is very cute, too."

This is the subtle approach. Sassier kids in the neighborhood have been known to put it more succinctly: "What is that dog?"

My response varies with my mood. Sometimes I identify our dog as a "purebred beach ball," other times as "a beagle-pig mix." And I think—I do not say it out loud, because it seems rude to rub it in—*And no matter how hard you look, no matter how much you pay for some fancy pants name-brand pooch, you will never find another dog who looks just like him.*

That is the beauty of those dogs once disparaged as "mongrels."

Mongrels! Ha! More like purebreds unto themselves.

Our dog is a mongrel, a mix, a mutt. He's the ultimate hybrid vehicle, a plump little scoop from the melting pot of doghood. And though his muttness means he was the result of an unplanned pregnancy—sometimes I whisper into his ear, "You were an accident!"—we could not be prouder.

Don't get me wrong: A dog is a dog is a dog, and all of them are beautiful and worthy of love. I have a soft spot for certain breeds—the hilariously hyper miniature pinschers,

Winston: Adopted by the Carlson family

Everybody needs somebody to lean on.

But not everybody has been leaned on by a 128-pound Doberman mix. When Winston leans affectionately, the objects of his devotion sometimes topple over.

That doesn't make the pale golden dog any less popular with his adopters, a Spokane, Wash., family who'd planned to foster Winston just briefly for Spokanimal C.A.R.E. They've fostered and adopted many animals in the past for the group, whose executive director, Gail Mackie, is a friend of the family.

But the dog acclimated to the Carlsons' household so well they ended up keeping him. He insisted on staking his claim, Christel Carlson says; when he arrived at the home, he bypassed the three shepherds and shepherd mixes to flop onto the dog bed closest to the fireplace, the warmest seat in the house. "I guess everyone realized he had the shortest hair and needed that bed," Carlson says, "because there were never any arguments."

While Winston fits perfectly into the family, he doesn't always fit under their table, which is where he likes to hang out during meals. Taller than the rescued pony who lives on the Carlsons' farm, Winston has to crouch down when he sneaks under, occupying most of the territory usually reserved for feet.



my fellow redheaded Irish setters. And while I was growing up, my family had purebred English cocker spaniels who all came from amazing, caring breeders. They were sweet-tempered, beautiful dogs, and for a while, I couldn't imagine getting another kind.

But in my 20s I came to work at The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and discovered shelter adoption. The first time I visited a shelter, I was floored by how many different kinds of funny, adorable, strange, lovely mixes were in the cages.

My first adoptee was a fluffy, lustrous, red-and-black shepherd-beagle-chow mix with shining golden-brown eyes; she looked like no dog I'd ever seen before. When people told me I looked like her, I took it as the highest compliment.

Animal shelters that have been slow to capitalize on these rare commodities would do well to learn from more profit-driven entities—like the snooty jewelry store aiming to appeal to well-heeled consumers in a TV commercial I recently saw. "We don't sell watches," the voice-over intoned in a velvety purr. "We don't sell bracelets. We sell ... exclusivity."

Can't shelters make the same claim? With their poodlebassettrievers and their Labracolliewhatsits and their ever-evolving lineup of shepherdsomethings, shelters should be the first place discriminating consumers go to find

animals as unique as they are. Adopting from a shelter is like shopping at a boutique where every item is one of a kind.

(OK, most boutique stores don't smell like bleach and cat food, but otherwise, the comparison stands.)

Over the years I've been baffled by the attitude that years of breeding for certain traits make for a better, more valuable animal. Maybe it's a difference in how we measure value; to my eye, no matter how perfectly pedigreed and healthy, a purebred collie looks virtually identical to the next purebred collie. And the more closely a purebred's physical traits meet the recognized breed standard, the "better" dog he is judged to be.

I understand the nostalgia that drives someone to get a dog just like the one she had as a child—or the desire that prompts a person to choose a canine companion based on the herding, jumping, and otherwise delightfully obsessive traits he's been bred for. But if looks alone are the measure of the ultimate dog, why get a replica?

Among some diehards I've known are women who would be mortified if they showed up at a party in the same dress as another woman—and yet take pride in having a dog who looks exactly like every other dog of that breed.

Yawn.

Crosby: Adopted by Sarah Babcock

Many folks get their mutts at the local animal shelter, but Sarah Babcock's first mutt came to get her.



When a Doberman mix turned up at Babcock's door as a stray in Richmond, Va., in 1996, Babcock searched for his

owner through fliers and ads in the paper.

No one showed up, and Babcock decided to keep him. Crosby was her first dog since childhood, when she'd enjoyed teaching the family pooches to behave.

When she took Crosby to training classes, Babcock learned that the old domination models for teaching dogs had evolved into more cooperative methods. And Crosby turned out to be a fast learner.

"I taught him how to get me drinks from the fridge in one morning," she says. "And I thought, 'This is so cool.' And when I thought about how many

dogs were still being jerked around by trainers and realized I could be a part of changing that, I got hooked."

She quit her job of 14 years, went back to graduate school, and is now the chief of education and training at the Richmond SPCA. She's adopted several mutts since then, three of whom were on a cover of *The Bark* magazine last year.

Crosby died last August. He had spent more than 10 years with Babcock, learned 50 tricks, worked as a therapy dog, and become part of the SPCA's humane education program.

He was still fetching drinks from the fridge until his last few weeks.

"There was a mutt who definitely changed a life," Babcock says. "You don't expect one dog wandering up will make you give up a corporate career and do something so different."

Amelia: Adopted by Amy Briggs

Almost as soon as The HSUS “adopted” Amy Briggs as *Animal Sheltering* magazine’s production



and marketing manager in 2008, Briggs returned the favor, adopting Amelia, a mysterious mix with smoke-colored fur and golden eyes.

Amelia had an adventuresome background. An escape artist, she’d slipped away from her former home and headed straight for the local golf course, where she evaded capture for several weeks. She was finally humanely trapped by Hedgesville Hounds, a rescue group based in Rockville, Md., but her family didn’t appreciate her Houdini act and no longer wanted her.

The rescue group had more sense and took the dog in for fostering.

And soon enough, Briggs—a recent college graduate whose top postgraduation plans had included finding a job and

adopting a dog—found her on Petfinder.com.

Since then, the initially skittish Amelia has settled into her new life. Now Briggs’ cubicle mate as part of The HSUS’s Dogs in the Office program, she’s known for looking just a little like a werewolf.

Curious about the genetic background of this mystical creature, Briggs had Amelia DNA-tested last year to see exactly what blend she had brought home. “I’d never seen anything like her,” she says.

Before the test, Briggs assumed her dog’s tendency to follow behind was prompted by the herding instincts bred

into Australian shepherds. “When I found her, that’s how she was listed,” she says. “But she doesn’t have any of that in her.”

Instead, the test results revealed that Amelia was one-quarter chow, one-quarter Lab, and one-quarter whippet, with assorted odds and ends making up that last 25 percent—making her a mystery who may never be fully solved, but is now fully loved.

Susie: Adopted by the Donovan family

Susie’s profile had been online for several weeks, but she’d had no takers yet.

The black mutt with a speckled white chest had several strikes against her. She was a big dog (many people are looking for pets who’ll meet the arbitrary weight requirements of apartment complexes), a black dog (they often don’t show well in online photos, disappearing into the shadows of their kennels), and an old dog (everyone wants an adorable puppy).

She had come to Oakland Animal Services because her previous owner had died. Day after day, she looked back at

the shelter staff and volunteers, her broad face silvered and serious. She was having a hard time at the shelter and was getting depressed. Volunteers were working to bring her out of her shell. When they took her out in the yard, they discovered that the old girl had a lot of love left to give. She would even chase a ball—“only a few times, and only a few feet, but still!” says Amy Hirschcron.

With fellow volunteers Tim Anderson and Steve LaChapelle, Hirschcron had gone above and beyond the call of duty to highlight Susie’s sweet nature on her Web profile,

taking pictures outside and adding video and music (the Isley Brothers’ “Who’s That Lady?”) in the hopes of catching someone’s eye and ear.

It worked: A family looking for an older pet to round out their crew of husband, wife, 4-year-old daughter, 7-year old dog, and 21-year-old cat saw Susie’s profile online and fell in love with her.

The feeling was mutual. Susie went home, and the last Hirschcron heard, the dog was licking the tears off the little girl’s face when she hurt herself playing.

“I really thought we were doing her the favor

by getting her out of the shelter, but it’s the other way around,” says adopter Betsy Donovan. “She’s done us the favor by bringing us so much love and laughter.”





MICHELLE RILEY/THE HSUS

Animal Sheltering editor Carrie Allan with her mysterious “beagle-pig mix.”

Mutts are for dog lovers. Where purebreds are primarily examples of the breed, mixes are primarily dogs, their dogginess superseding all breed characteristics. Give me the short-legged retriever mix, the protuberant pug-spaniel cross, the piggy-tailed greyhound with long, dangly ears. There is no more American dog.

For years, scientists have debated the merits of “hybrid vigor”—the notion that crossbreeding different genetic lines makes for healthier individuals—and how it applies to dogs. Many experts say it’s only logical that animals from genetically diverse backgrounds will be healthier and less prone to the inherited flaws passed down through family lines.

But I’m not interested in proving that mutts have better genes; I just think they’re cooler. I want a dog I can contemplate, and I find mutts more interesting: Each one is a fingerprint, a unique work of art who’s part Pollack, part Picasso. Each one is her own little self-contained mystery, a dog to inspire reflection about the vast history of doghood that came before—the wolves, the foxes, the hounds and spaniels and terriers, a millennia-old baying, bawling pack rolled into one righteous pooch.

Coltrane’s primary breed is obviously beagle, but there’s a good bit of something else mixed in there, too. He’s stockier and plumper than a traditional beagle, his ears are shorter, and he lacks the classic black patches that mark the standard tricolors of the breed. (Sometimes I like to imagine the unholy union between beagle and sow that might have produced him.)

He is getting older, and my husband and I are beginning to have moments when we realize—as we watch him become whiter, struggle to rise from the couch, and sleep more and more of his hours away—that he will not be with us forever.

And there’s the real heartbreaker of mutts. Now and then you find that perfect beaglepiggywhatsit, the one you love so much and find so endearingly funny and delightful and cannot imagine living without—and you know you’re in the same boat with your poor deprived neighbors: You, too, will never find another dog like him. [AS](#)

SPICY CONDI-MUTTS

Heinz 57 sauce is a condiment, reddish and spicy, but the term “Heinz 57” was originally coined to brag about the great variety of products offered by the ketchup company. Over time, the phrase has also come to refer to a single mutt made up of so many different breeds that it’s really anyone’s guess exactly what “ingredients” he contains.



HE’S A TRAMP, BUT THEY LOVE HIM

Many still think of Lassie as the quintessential American dog, but the fictional purebred collie has some muttly friends who are just as iconic, including Disney’s Tramp, TV dog Benji—first played by a shelter adoptee named Higgins, who was already 15 years old when he signed on for the role in the first Benji flick in 1974—and the dog who broke a thousand hearts, Old Yeller.



SIX MIXED-BREEDS OF KEVIN BACON?

When it comes to getting a pet, “doing the right thing is also doing the sexy thing,” says Julia Szabo, a writer and mutt proponent who’s quick to rattle off a long list of celebs, including Kevin Bacon and wife Kyra Sedgwick, who have adopted mutts. Szabo once dyed her own hair to match one of her mutts, and she loves mixed breeds so much she even wrote a book about them, *The Underdog*. She continues to advocate for shelter adoption whenever she can. “It’s the cool, sexy, Hollywood thing to do,” she says.



DOGGIE DNA

These days, you can solve the mystery background of your own mutt by having his DNA tested. Most of the commercially available tests cost around \$60; more expensive ones screen for more breeds. The dog’s DNA is gathered via a cheek swab—which you can do at home, provided your pooch is amenable—or a blood test, which must be conducted by a veterinarian.



Risky Business

Finding insurance can be tough for shelters and rescue groups, but here's how to convince companies that you're a safe bet

BY JIM BAKER



PHOTO COLLAGE / BUSSOLATI

A dog you've adopted out bites a child a few weeks later.

A customer slips and falls on a wet floor in your building.

A volunteer transporting a pet to a nursing home to visit residents has a car accident, and the other driver is hurt.

Any of these situations, if it were to result in a lawsuit, could lead to the financial crippling of an animal shelter or rescue group—and the end of its mission.

That's where insurance comes in.

"Our job is to make sure when these things go wrong—because they will, no matter what—that the organization has proper insurance to protect itself, to make sure that it doesn't bankrupt itself by defending a case or paying a settlement out of pocket," says Craig Sherman, a partner at Prince Associates Inc., an

insurance brokerage in Hicksville, N.Y., that offers a program for insuring animal welfare organizations. (Prince Associates doesn't actually hold the policies, but helps shelters find coverage.) "The insurance pays for the settlements, for the claim payments, for the injuries or property damage to others, and the goal is for the organization to transfer that risk, that possible monetary loss, to the insurance policy."

But it's often hard for shelters and rescues to find the coverage they need at a price they can afford. The reason: Rightly or wrongly, many insurance companies view them as big claims waiting to happen.

Insurers see operations fraught with potential liability: staff performing physically demanding tasks and working closely with animals who have an unknown history and may behave unpredictably; facilities that are

open to the public; organizations that depend on volunteers who, despite training and orientation, might not follow rules.

On top of that, animal welfare organizations are an unknown quantity for lots of insurance companies that don't really understand the details of their facilities and operations. And what is unknown is seen as potentially risky. Have a restaurant or a retail store that needs insuring? No problem—these companies write that type of coverage every day. Need insurance for your shelter or rescue group? You've got some persuading to do.

The Knowledge Gap

Sheltering is "just an area that isn't very well understood. If you ask a hundred people in any town, "What do they do at your local shelter," they'd say, "Oh, I don't know—they

Shelters can make themselves more appealing as potential clients by having standard operating procedures in place and doing all they can to reduce potential liability in their operations.

take in strays, and they adopt them,' and that's really about all they know about it," says Steve Putnam, executive director of the National Federation of Humane Societies in Vienna, Va.

"So people don't have a real good grasp of what all kinds of work shelters do, and consequently, insurance companies haven't really wanted to take the time to assess the real risk in the business and write a policy."

Putnam's familiar with this issue from his former work with The Humane Society of the United States, where he served as vice president of business development and corporate relations. He helped create its Shelter Partners program, which provides participating shelters with discounts on products and services (including, now, preferred rates on insurance).

"The whole idea behind Shelter Partners ... is that it's designed to provide group buying for shelters, and insurance is one of the things that shelters told us they had a real issue with," he says.

Putnam tried to come up with a group health insurance policy that the program could get for shelter staff and volunteers, but he could never find an insurance company willing to underwrite it.

"We did get a company to write general liability for shelters through the Shelter Partners program. It was priced reasonably well, [but] it was never very successful, and the company dropped it, because they only had 25 or 30 shelters sign up for it," he says.

It's a still a challenging environment, but fortunately, there are brokers and insurance carriers out there that have decided to service the sheltering field or that specialize in insuring nonprofits, including animal welfare organizations.

Shelters and rescues can also take steps to make themselves more appealing as potential clients by demonstrating professionalism and transparency, having written policies and standard operating procedures designed to protect staff and the public from injury, and doing all they can to reduce potential liability in their operations.

"When you're talking to an insurance company, you're talking to a for-profit entity, and we're asking them often to put up a million, two million, five million dollars of their own capital at risk for really a pretty small payment, and they want to feel confi-

dent that their partner—the policy holder—is going to do a good job of minimizing claims," says Jeff Stone, vice president of John O. Bronson Co., an insurance brokerage in Sacramento, Calif.

Barking Up the Right Tree

Go local—that's the first step many animal welfare organizations take when they start their search for insurance, according to Sherman.

A shelter executive director may think of the local insurance agent she turned to for her own home and auto insurance. But while the agent's probably a nice guy, he typically specializes in personal lines of insurance, and that's not what a shelter requires.

What's needed is a commercial insurance broker, but not just anyone. Rather, you need to find a broker who has the expertise and knowledge to deal with a shelter or rescue group—which, if you'll forgive the pun—is an entirely different animal than, say, a delicatessen or retail store that needs insurance.

"This is the kind of thing that most agents don't see every day, so they don't know what the availability for markets [is], and they don't know how to write it, and usually they just give up," Sherman says. "So a lot of the phone calls we get from prospective organizations are, 'You know, we tried with a local broker, and he just couldn't do anything.'"

Of course, this isn't *always* the case, but it's a good general rule of thumb. If there's a commercial broker in your town or state who can do the job for you, great. But you may need to do some research, and cast your net a little wider—sometimes a lot wider—to find what you need.

Prince Associates has benefited from knowing the sheltering market. About 1,800 animal welfare organizations around the nation participate in the insurance program that the brokerage specifically designed for shelters, rescue groups, and spay/neuter clinics. Some of the industry-specific elements the company offers include professional liability that encompasses certain jobs or sideline operations shelters might be involved in, like veterinarians working in a spay/neuter clinic or animal trainers doing obedience training. Prince also offers "animal bailee" coverage, which is property coverage for animals who are in the organization's custody while they're being held.





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Love is not the only thing in the air. Canine influenza virus (CIV) has been confirmed in dogs across 30 states and the District of Columbia, and shelter dogs are particularly at risk.¹ Highly contagious and sometimes deadly, CIV is often mistaken for kennel cough, but the clinical signs of influenza can be more severe. And because virtually every dog exposed to the virus becomes infected,² CIV spreads quickly in social settings. However, you can protect your dogs with the first vaccine for canine flu, Canine Influenza Vaccine, H3N8.

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References:

1. Syndromic surveillance data of Cyndy Crawford, DVM, PhD, University of Florida, and Edward Dubovi, PhD, Cornell University
2. Key facts about canine influenza. CDC Website. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/canine>. Accessed May 1, 2009.
3. Data on file, Intervet/Schering-Plough Animal Health.

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Resources

If you're interested in learning more about insurance issues affecting animal welfare organizations, or want to start looking for a commercial broker or insurance carrier, here are some good places to go:

- **Nonprofit Risk Management Center** (*nonprofitrisk.org*) offers a wealth of information, including advice, online tools, and a library of relevant articles.
- **Nonprofits Insurance Alliance Group** (*insurancefornonprofits.org*) will guide you to two sister organizations: Alliance of Nonprofits for Insurance and Risk Management Group, operating in 25 states; and Nonprofits' Insurance Alliance of California, operating only in that state. Both of these are insurance carriers (and nonprofits themselves) that exclusively serve 501(c)(3) organizations, including hundreds of shelters and rescues.
- **Prince Associates Inc. Insurance Managers** (*www.animalshelterinsurance.com*) is an insurance agency that offers a program specifically designed for animal welfare organizations. Prince Associates is also an associate in the Shelter Partners program of The Humane Society of the United States. Shelters that become members of the program are eligible to receive preferred rates, among other benefits.
- **Philadelphia Insurance Cos.** (*phly.com*) offers a Nonprofit Package Insurance Program designed to provide a wide range of special insurance needs for 501(c)(3) organizations, including animal shelters.
- **Insurance Group USA** (*insurancegroupusa.com*) has a program designed for animal rescue organizations and shelters.
- **Great American Insurance Group** (*greatamericaninsurance.com*) has a specialty human services division that offers products and services to animal-related organizations, including animal protection and welfare groups, shelters, aquariums, humane societies, sanctuaries, and zoos.
- **John O. Bronson Co.** (*johnobronson.com*) is an independent insurance agency in Sacramento, Calif., with experience in insuring animal welfare organizations.

But the executive director of a small shelter in, say, rural Oklahoma isn't going to find the company in the Yellow Pages of the local phone book, nor is the name of that brokerage likely to be on the lips of a hometown insurance agent.

That's why it's smart to reach out to colleagues in the animal welfare field, such as executive directors of other shelters, for referrals to insurance experts who could help—whether they're located in the nearest big city, another state, or even halfway across the country.

The next step is taking your search online, where you can find the websites of insurance brokerages and underwriters that have programs for nonprofits and, in some cases, shelters and rescues in particular.

In other words, don't be afraid to think national.

Make the Rules— and Follow Them

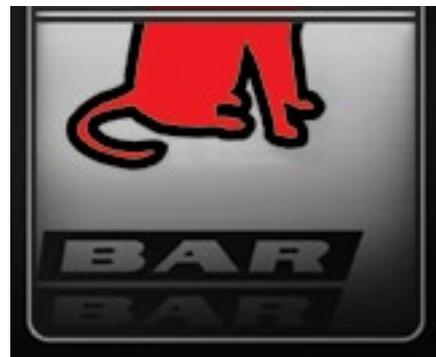
An insurance broker who has experience working with shelters and rescues can advise you on steps you can take to make yourself more attractive to insurance companies.

It starts with the way your organization presents itself to the broker, and through him or her, to the insurance companies who will review your application for coverage. That application, and often a site visit by the broker, will give the companies a window into your operations, and what they see should instill confidence that you will make a trustworthy partner.

(Note to the insurance-lingo challenged: A broker's job is to find, compare, and present competitive quotations from insurance carriers, regarding price and coverage, for a client's consideration. The broker typically gets a service fee or commission, based on a percentage of the premium, from the insurance company for making a sale.)

And a site visit to your facility (if you have one) is standard. Your broker, and often a local or regional representative of the insurance company, will tour your property and do a safety inspection.

"In some ways, it's no different than when you talk to donors—it's just a different kind of 'sell,' if I can use that word," says John Nagy, vice president for finance and administration at the Dumb Friends League in Denver.



Be prepared to address any issues that the broker identifies as potential barriers to coverage. You need to promote yourself as a risk worth taking.

Be prepared to address any issues that the broker identifies as potential barriers to coverage. "You want to promote [yourself] to the insurance industry: 'We're a very good business, we're doing something very valuable for the community, and we need your help to cover the risks that we have. We *want* your recommendations. We want you to give us ideas on how to *improve* our operations,'" Nagy says.

Insurers look for evidence that an organization has clear, written policies and procedures in place that outline how your shelter or rescue should function, especially in regard to any task or activity that has the potential to injure a staff member or visitor.

Having those policies is one thing; ensuring they're followed is equally important. Employees and volunteers must be trained in those procedures "and know that it's absolutely important—essential—that they follow them," says Pamela Davis, president and CEO of the Nonprofits' Insurance Alliance of California, a liability insurance pool that exclusively serves 501(c)(3) organizations in that state.

“That’s just number one, because if you have policies and procedures in place that are excellent, but your people aren’t following them, that makes it even worse for you in a lawsuit, because your employees ignored what you said they should be doing.”

The Sacramento (Calif.) SPCA, for example, has an Injury/Illness Prevention Program that guides the shelter as it tries to reduce risk. The program’s policy manual outlines the shelter’s policies, provides instructions on how to perform various tasks, explains the procedures for reporting injuries, offers directions on how to respond to emergencies, and details the responsibilities of different levels of management.

Every month, there’s a training session for each department of the shelter, touching on different aspects of safety in the workplace. A committee is tasked with going through the facility routinely, making observations, and recommending how to make things safer.

Staff members take the time to educate volunteers about the proper ways to interact with animals, in order to reduce the risk of injury. “We have a really comprehensive volunteer training program,” says Mike Oei, the shelter’s finance director/controller. “It’s four, separate weekend days that you have to come before you can even walk a dog.”

The best way to persuade insurance companies that you’re a professional and responsible organization, of course, is to show them that you have a good track record.

“We have a very large humane society that we’ve insured since 1993, and you look at their claims history, and they’ve had a hundred claims over that time, but they’re a very good insurance risk,” Davis says.

“When they have *do* have claims, it’s clear that even though there may be a lawsuit, that they have followed their practices. There may be something that happens, but it doesn’t become a huge difficulty to defend, because they are a responsible organization, and accidents happen—that’s why you have insurance.” **AS**



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Unchained

A Virginia city passes a chaining ordinance a decade in the making



Companion animals kept on chains for long periods of time have posed a big problem in Danville, Va. Many times each year, the Danville Area Humane Society has received dogs who had chains embedded in their necks, and there have even been cruelty cases involving cats kept on chains.

In December 2009, the city council of Danville, Va., unanimously passed an ordinance that strictly limits the amount of time people are allowed to keep their pets on chains. The ordinance, which will go into effect this July, forbids the chaining of any animal for more than four hours in any 24-hour period, and forbids the practice outright for animals who are injured or under 4 months old, and during times when the temperature reaches freezing.

The new law is the endpoint of years of work by Paulette Dean, executive director of the Danville Area Humane Society, and her

staff and network of supporters. In December, Mike Markarian, president of the Humane Society Legislative Fund—a 501(c)(3) that lobbies for animal welfare legislation and works to elect humane-minded candidates to public office—interviewed Dean about her experiences and published the conversation on his blog; we’re reprinting an excerpted version here.

As Markarian pointed out, many animal shelter leaders believe they can’t lobby for animal protection laws, or are so overwhelmed with day-to-day operations that they don’t have the time to spend on

advocacy. “But,” Markarian wrote, “if we only address the symptoms of the problems when animals are in distress, we will never get to the root causes of those problems and prevent animals from ending up in distress in the first place.”

Mike Markarian: Can you tell us a little bit about Danville as a community? What are some of the challenges for animals and animal lovers there?

Paulette Dean: Danville, a city of about 48,000 on the North Carolina state line, is struggling to redefine itself after the loss of



Paulette Dean

the textile and tobacco industries. It has the highest unemployment rate in the state, and also struggles with low education and high poverty rates.

Animal issues have been low priorities in the past. The Danville Area Humane Society operates the city animal shelter, and receives about 5,500 dogs and cats each year, along with approximately 250 other companion animals and livestock.

Perhaps because of the problems that come as a result of poverty, there is a severe pet overpopulation problem. Although the humane society has helped 17,000 dogs and cats get spayed or neutered since 1993, the numbers received at the shelter increase each year.

We seem to have a higher incidence of animal neglect and abuse than surrounding areas, although that may be because we have two court-appointed humane investigators (a volunteer position in Virginia). The board president and I have functioned as investigators for many years, and we have a strong working relationship with the police department and animal control officers. We investigate and prosecute many cases each year, including starvation, hoarding, dogfighting, and varying degrees of neglect.

How did you approach the chaining issue, and what has led to your successes?

As we investigated complaints of neglect, one thing became very apparent: 90 percent of the complaints received involve companion

animals constantly kept on chains. We were “fortunate” to have a gallery of hundreds of pictures that were taken of dogs on chains.

Seventeen years ago when I began full-time employment with the Danville Area Humane Society, we received a call from a man who said he had heard a dog whining in the woods behind his house, but he had not heard the dog whine for a couple of days. The animal control officer went to the address, and found the body of a dog in the woods. The dog had once been chained and evidently broke loose somehow, but still dragged the chain. The chain became entangled in bushes, and the dog starved to death. The animal control officer told me then that I should work to get all dogs off chains.

In 1996, parts of Danville were flooded as a result of Hurricane Fran. Then-Gov. George Allen toured the area, and saw the bodies of two dogs who had drowned as they were chained to their doghouses. He had his driver stop, and he knocked on the door to tell the woman he wanted the bodies buried. He even stopped by later that day to make sure that had been done.

The task of getting animals off chains seemed pretty overwhelming at that time. However, through the years that thought never left my mind whenever we received a dog with an embedded chain in his neck (many, many times each year) or when I saw for myself the chained dogs in backyards with no shelter, food, or water. I knew something had to be done.

Most dogs we held for rabies quarantine were dogs who were kept on chains. Make no mistake—the problem was not just having dogs constantly chained. We also investigated a few horrific cases of cats kept on chains. We knew that any effort to get dogs off chains had to include all companion animals.

With the support of the board (after all, the board president also functions as a humane investigator; he was with me for the vast majority of the cruelty cases), we held a summit meeting of sorts about three years ago. We invited veterinarians, dog trainers, representatives of the kennel club, and others we thought would be interested. We showed pictures of a few of our abuse and cruelty cases. From that meeting, we had the support of most of the people who worked with animals; we all agreed the overpopulation

problem and the plight of chained dogs topped the list of problems faced by animals.

Our anti-chaining campaign was announced, with no plan of what we could do about it. The newspaper did an editorial about how we may be sincere, but we had not convinced the public. That we took as a challenge and a lesson. We met with the editors of the paper (very nice people who supported our work), and showed them pictures of our cases. We began to issue more news releases of our court cases. We purchased ads in the paper about the loneliness of chained dogs, and wrote articles for our newsletter.

I met separately with each of the nine city council members and shared the pictures and stories with them. We proposed that an ordinance be enacted to prohibit the chaining of dogs on unoccupied property. At the city council, we testified about how people chained large numbers of pit bulls in the yards of empty homes. That ordinance passed easily for, as one council member said, “It is a no-brainer.”

How did you continue your campaign after that first ordinance passed?

Nothing happened for a couple of years, and then [in the summer of 2009], we decided we needed to reenergize the campaign. We issued a news release, inviting members of the public to come to a meeting about our anti-chaining campaign. We had a very nice turnout for that meeting.

We told the attendees that the best thing they could do would be to call city council members, and encourage their family and friends to do so. We told them we would notify them when it was time to begin making the contacts.

The board of directors of the Danville Area Humane Society voted to commit \$10,000 to help build fences for dogs to get them off chains, with the requirement that we also be allowed to spay or neuter the animals, at our expense, for whom we build fences.

A city council member happened to visit the shelter as we were bringing in a dog we had just seized. He saw the embedded collar and the thin body condition, and asked the city manager to please put a proposed ordinance on the agenda for a work session of the city council.

We prepared a PowerPoint presentation, and went to the work session. We asked for a three-hour limit in a 24-hour period, and told about our \$10,000 commitment. We talked about how this would help decrease the number of unwanted births. With the media there, we showed the pictures and told the stories. We also asked for delayed enforcement to give people time to make other arrangements for their chained animals.

Council members decided to advance the proposed ordinance, but they scheduled two public hearings. We posted the dates on our website, so no one could accuse us of hiding the truth from them. The editor of the newspaper wrote a very strong editorial in support of the ordinance.

As soon as the proposed ordinance was put on the agenda, we sent out an e-mail alert to supporters. Council members later said that it was apparent that the community was in overwhelming support. The newspaper allows anonymous online comments, so we asked people to respond to any negative comment.

We had about 45 supporters show up for the two public hearings. For the first one,

we had asked strong speakers to speak up. I gave a brief overview of my experiences with chained animals. I reminded them that I had personally taken the horrible pictures that they had seen, and the pictures were taken in Danville, Va. A veterinarian, an attorney who had helped us with our civil custody cases, and other supporters told stories and gave facts.

We thought it would be helpful to have a teenager speak. The president of a local high school club agreed, [but] tragically, her father was killed three days before the public hearing. I sent an urgent e-mail to our list, asking them to help us find another young person who could speak. One young woman stepped forward. She was terrified, and spoke softly, but she begged the city council to make Danville a better place to live—for the humans and for the animals. She held them spellbound by her courage and her conviction.

A couple of days before the second public hearing, someone wrote a letter to the city council, bringing up the point that people who live in the historic district are not allowed to have chain-link fences for

their dogs. A motion was made to table the ordinance until that issue could be resolved. Immediately after that meeting, a small group attended the work session. Council members resolved that concern, and an amended ordinance was submitted. Actually, the amendments strengthened the ordinance.

However, we sent yet another e-mail alert, urging supporters to not give up the battle. I heard from a few council members who said they had received only two negative comments, but had been inundated with positive comments.

A week and a half later, the proposed ordinance passed. One council member could not attend, but he asked the mayor to give his regrets and assure the public that if he had been there, his vote would have been "yes." When the mayor announced that and said the vote was unanimous, we gave the council a standing ovation. It was apparent to everyone that it was an ordinance whose time had come. 🏆

To read the complete interview, go to animalsheltering.org/Danville_chaining.



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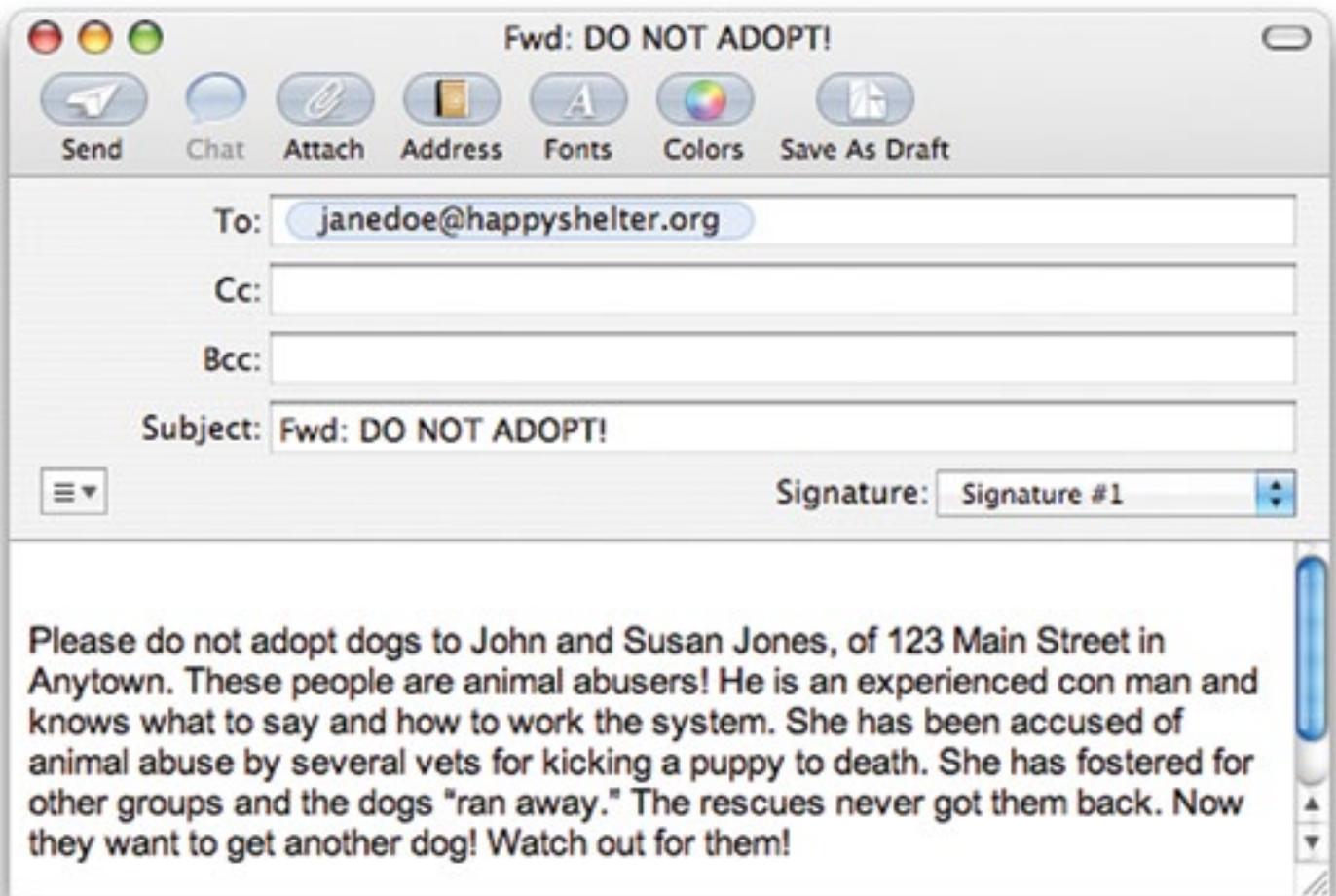
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“Do Not Adopt”? More Like “Do Not Forward”

The legal hazards of “do not adopt” lists

BY CHERIE TRAVIS



People in animal welfare often feel an overwhelming desire to protect innocent animals from harm. And an e-mail like this can be hard to resist forwarding: What if it’s true? What if, right this minute, the evil John Jones is at the front counter of an animal shelter, trying to adopt an animal he may hurt? What if forwarding this e-mail could stop that?

I frequently receive e-mails like the one above from organizations and individuals posting DNAs—Do Not Adopt recommendations. They also turn up on shelter and rescue listservs. Almost always, the sender is for-

warding an e-mail that originated with someone else. So, the question is, can you be liable for creating a message like this? What about for forwarding it?

Unfortunately, the answer is yes. Under some circumstances, the subject of the e-mail can sue.

Defamation and libel are legal causes of action that are available to people if there have been publications of false statements about them. In fact—even if you think you’re simply just passing on the message, acting as an individual—your employer may be named

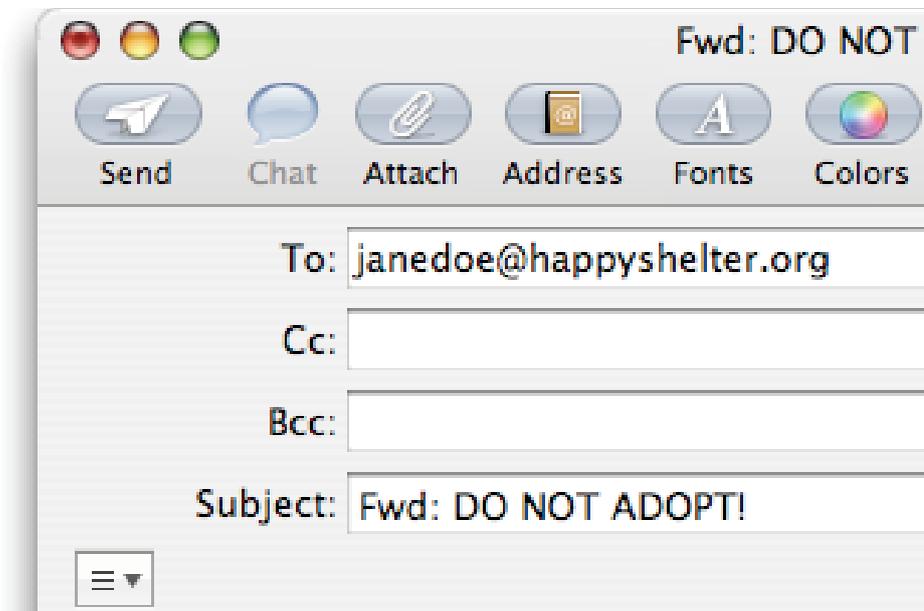
in the lawsuit if you send the messages from your work computer.

This column is not intended to scare anyone, but to educate readers about the limits of free speech and provide advice on how to remain an advocate without becoming a defendant!

What are Defamation and Libel?

Defamation, libel, and slander are civil actions that allege harm to a person’s or entity’s reputation. Defamatory oral statements are slander; written ones are libel. Most state

[humane law forum]



courts, like those of Kansas and New York, have defined the elements of a defamation and libel claim to include false and defamatory words regarding the plaintiff, communicated or published to a third person, which result in harm to the reputation of the person defamed. Damage to one's reputation is the essence of an action for defamation.

Most states also consider certain types of false statements to be so serious that they are libelous or defamatory per se, which means that damages are presumed and need not be proven separately. These categories include false statements that the plaintiff has committed a crime; statements that injure the plaintiff in his business, trade, or profession; statements that a plaintiff has a communicable disease; or that allege unchastity.

So is the content of the above e-mail defamatory?

Animal abuse is a crime in every state, so stating that someone is an animal abuser is accusing that person of committing a crime. Likewise, calling someone a "con man" or "con artist" suggests that he swindles people. And in Illinois, beating a puppy to death is a felony. So all of these statements—if they turned out to be false—would be defamatory.

The Limits on Free Speech

I am often asked, "But what about free speech?"

The term "free speech" is loosely tossed about and quite a bit misunderstood. "Free

speech" means that a person has the right to express her views and sentiments publicly. It does not mean that a person can say anything, anywhere with no repercussions. When a person publishes statements that are illegal, offensive, or improper, he may be held accountable.

There are a number of areas of speech that are outside the protection of the Constitution—examples include obscenity, child pornography, perjury, blackmail, threats of violence, incitement to imminent lawless action, solicitation to commit a crime, and, most important to our discussion, defamation.

E-mail is Speech

"But it was just a little e-mail!" you might say.

Even if you didn't print your accusation on the front page of *The New York Times*, even if you didn't post it on the wall of your local grocery store, the defamation/libel requirement that the false statements be "published" to a third party is met when you send an e-mail.

Moreover, sending that e-mail from your work computer can subject you and your employer to litigation. In a 2009 case, an employee at the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department received an e-mail that made defamatory statements about a member of her church. The employee forwarded that e-mail to 89 other e-mail addresses. Because of that simple act, she and her employer became defendants in a lawsuit. An

appeals court held that the plaintiff could proceed in her defamation case against the author of the e-mail, the employee who forwarded it, and the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department.

Are Anonymous Postings Really Anonymous?

It used to be that writers had to identify themselves in print publications. Newspapers rarely, if ever, ran a letter to the editor unless the author allowed the publication of her name.

The Internet changed all that. Now, anyone with a computer can make statements that can reach a worldwide audience and very often, they can do so completely anonymously.

Or at least they think they can. Anonymity can disappear quickly and unexpectedly.

If you have any question about whether anonymous postings will always remain anonymous, just ask Rosemary Port of New York. The fashion blogger, who anonymously posted statements about model Liskula Cohen on a website called "Skanks in NYC," found her anonymity lifted when Cohen won a court decision forcing Google to identify the anonymous blogger. Cohen's lawyers argued that, based on the statements that were defamatory per se, she would be a plaintiff in a defamation action if she could ascertain the identity of the blogger. Port learned the hard way that freedom of speech is not unlimited.

Potential Defenses

In such defamation cases, the two available defenses are: 1) arguing that the statements are true; and 2) arguing that they are opinion—neither can be proven "false."

So, if a "Do Not Adopt" e-mail stated that "Mr. X is a dogfighter" and, in fact, it could be shown that Mr. X has been recently convicted of dogfighting, the statement is truthful and cannot be defamatory.

Likewise, if an e-mail stated, "I was uncomfortable with how Ms. Y handled the shelter dogs; I thought she was rough on them," that could be defended. It was the belief of the writer, and the statement is not defamatory because it is her opinion.

But courts have declared that merely couching a statement as an opinion is not necessarily a defense if there is an underlying

ing fact that can be proven or disproven. The statement, "I think Mr. Z abuses his children" can cause as much harm to Mr. Z's reputation as saying, "Mr. Z abuses his children." In other words, you can make statements of opinion, but if you want to be protected from accusations of defamation or libel, those statements cannot imply or express inaccurate facts.

Best Strategies

Next time you receive one of these "Do Not Adopt" e-mails, give it some serious consideration. Are the claims it makes provable? Can you find reference to them in reliable sources, such as newspapers or court records? (Most blogs and listservs should not be considered reliable sources of facts.)

Do you trust the sender? Even if the sender is your dearest friend or trusted supervisor, do you believe the sender checked the facts in the e-mail personally and verified them before forwarding the message to you? If you think about these issues, and they set off your internal alarm bells, don't forward the e-mail.

Still, these e-mails can be compelling. And some of them may be factual. How can you balance your organization's need not to end up at the wrong end of a libel suit with its mission to protect animals?

First and most important, if you have knowledge that someone is harming animals, contact the appropriate police or humane law enforcement agency! Merely circulating e-mails, while well-intentioned, does not prohibit an offender from obtaining animals from "free to good home" ads in a newspaper, adopting them from organizations that aren't as active on e-mail and listservs, or even stealing them from backyards.

If the police are dismissive or refuse to investigate, you may want to seek the help of an animal law attorney. The Animal Legal Defense Fund is a great resource for finding help—its website lists 19 state and 13 regional bar associations that have animal law committees (aldf.org/article.php?id=277), as



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 co-founder of PACT Humane Society.

well as 116 law schools that teach animal law; instructors at those institutions may be able to advise you.

Second, when making or passing along statements, make sure the "facts" are actually factual and that your opinion is stated as your opinion. Example:

- *I saw the dogs tied up outside her house.* (If you saw this, it is a statement of fact.)
- *I thought they looked very thin.* (This is a statement of opinion, one that describes your concern without accusing anyone of starving their animals.)

You can keep advocating for animals—just keep these points in mind before hitting the "send" key! **AS**

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

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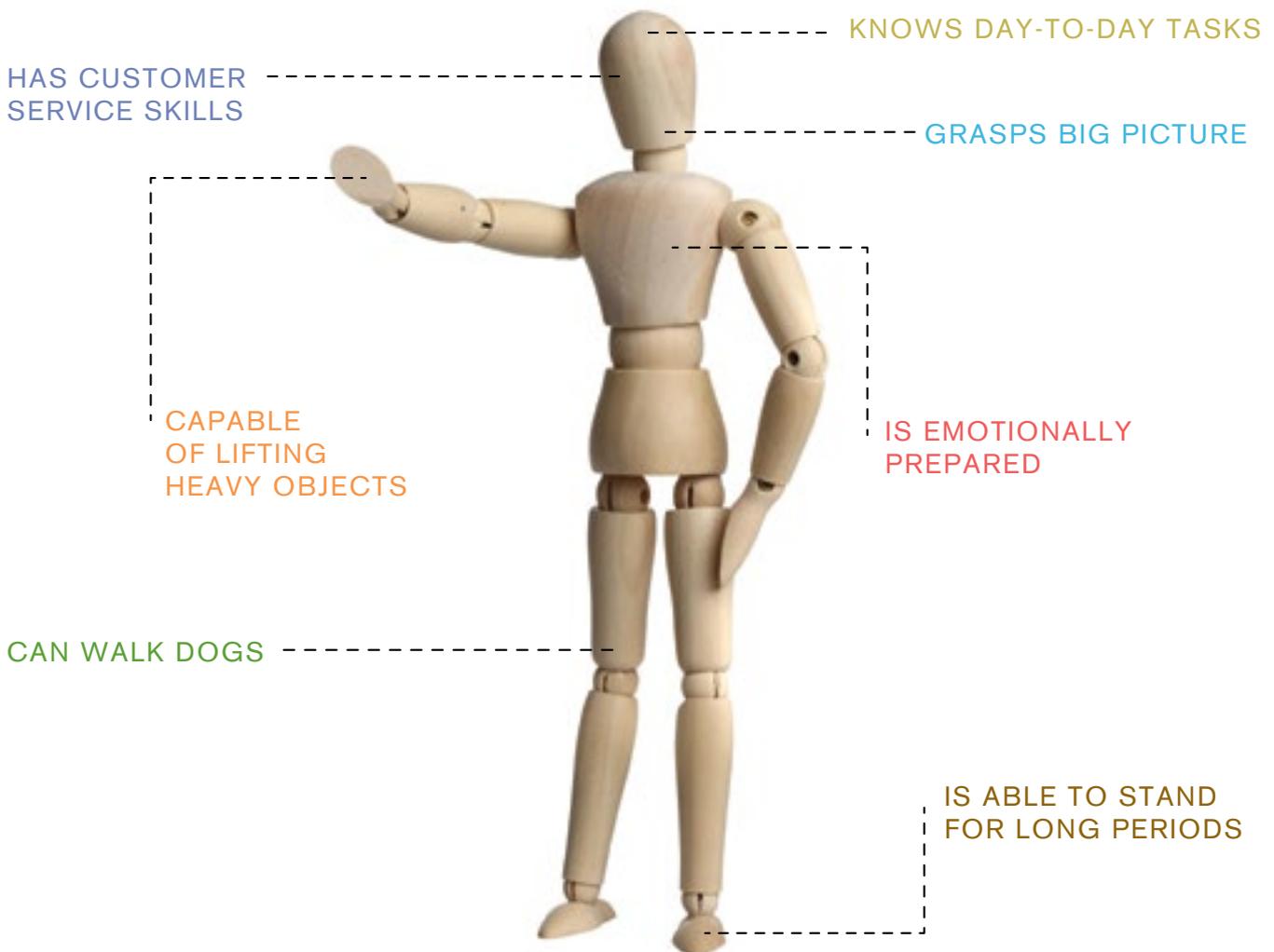
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Take Time for Training

Successful volunteer programs rely on well-prepared people matched to the right roles

BY HILARY ANNE HAGER AND MEGAN WEBB



Over and over again, we see it: Animal welfare agencies caught in a catch-22. They know they need volunteers to help complete the tremendous amount of work that needs to be done, but they often feel they don't have time to train them. But failing to train volunteers always backfires and leads agencies to lose more time fixing the problems untrained volunteers can create.

Staff members often fear that volunteers will cause more trouble than they're worth,

be disruptive, make high-stakes mistakes, give out incorrect information, or somehow set up the animals for failure. Nearly all of these issues can be prevented with the right training for the right individuals in the right jobs.

It's critical to figure out what type of program you need and want to have. If you need people who are experts from the get-go, you can recruit only dog trainers and cat whisperers and cut down on your need to train on basic animal handling and training skills.

Keep in mind, though, that even if people are experts in a general sense, they will have little understanding of how their knowledge applies in your organization. They will still need orientation to the ground rules and lay of the land.

If the work requires little previous knowledge of animal welfare or animal care, it might not matter what type of volunteer you bring in, as long as you can provide the general framework for their tasks. These volun-

[volunteer management]

MANAGER SKILL: -----
**CAN BEND OVER
BACKWARD TO
ENSURE VOLUNTEERS
ARE PROPERLY
TRAINED**



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teers might help organize donated supplies, do yard work, or hand out informational fliers at events—all useful tasks, but ones that may not require experienced volunteers.

Both inexperienced and expert volunteers can be helpful, but you should never bring in inexperienced volunteers and assign them work that must be done in a particular way (with serious consequences if it is not), and then fail to provide the training they need to succeed. This happens all the time, in all kinds of shelters and rescue groups across the country. It's a setup for frustration and disappointment, and a surefire way to have things go badly for everyone.

To create a training program or revise an existing one, start by selecting one volunteer position in your agency, then break it down into its different elements. What specific things do the volunteers need to know how to do from the minute they arrive for their shift until the time they're ready to leave? Use the chart provided at animalsheltering.org/volunteer_skills to identify the knowledge and abilities needed for the position. How important are each of these to the position? Which ones must a volunteer have

when they start the position, and which ones can your organization instill through training or support?

For example, if you evaluate your dog volunteer position and realize you need your volunteers to provide education to the public, the ability to communicate will be a critical skill. Most agencies don't have the ability to teach new volunteers communication skills, so you'll probably have to screen volunteers beforehand.

Knowledge

Potential volunteers need to grasp the bigger picture of the organization (*Is it public or private? Does it provide sheltering or fostering? What programs and services does it offer?*) and the smaller picture, knowing how to complete specific day-to-day tasks. They need to know how to answer questions from the public, speaking about the organization and its functions with language that the organization provides—rather than making up their own answers based on possibly faulty information. Each organization will need to determine the best way to provide instruction in these areas.

Physical Skills

Each volunteer position has a different set of physical requirements. For example, walking dogs is likely to be more physically rigorous than assisting the public with the adoption process. Organizations should look at each task and identify the physical abilities the volunteers need to be safe, do the job effectively, and meet the organization's needs. It's useful to make potential volunteers aware of the requirements during their introduction to the organization and its volunteer opportunities, especially if the requirements for each position vary widely. Many people simply don't have any idea of what the organization's needs are, or what volunteering might involve. Sharing the physical needs with them early in the process will help them to self-identify where they might fit best. Physical skills (such as the ability to lift certain weights or stand for long periods) are things the volunteers must innately have; the organization is unlikely to be able to train volunteers in these areas.

Mental Skills

The mental skills required can range from being able to read, write, and communicate effectively to possessing excellent customer service and problem-solving abilities. Each volunteer task will have different requirements, and a thorough examination of what the organization needs to succeed will help determine which types of people will be best suited to each role.

Emotional Skills

Most agencies remember that they need to train their volunteers on the knowledge and physical needs of the position, but they forget the emotional aspects. We need to prepare volunteers to deal with the emotions they are going to face when working with homeless animals, upset citizens, and frustrated or even hostile staff. Volunteering with animals is not like volunteering at a Little League, child's school, or thrift store; it's a highly emotionally charged environment that requires people to be emotionally prepared to function well within it.

When you look at the list of possible skills we've provided, you may feel overwhelmed. However, your agency will benefit by realizing that if you truly don't have the resources

to do much training, then you need to focus on screening for volunteers who already have those skills or pare down the job description to require less. You don't want to put an untrained volunteer into a position that asks them to do things beyond their capacities. You must either provide training, require less from the volunteers, or screen for volunteers with existing skills.

The good news is that you don't have to conduct all the training yourself. You should take advantage of the expertise and experience of your staff and longtime volunteers by having them help. It will save you quite a bit of time, increase staff buy-in and support of the volunteer program, and build leadership and commitment among your core volunteers.

The most important elements of successful training are making sure you properly identify the information that needs to be shared, the right methods of sharing it, and the right people to deliver the material. We've heard that humans only retain 20 percent of what they hear. They retain 40 percent of what they hear and see, but retain 80 percent of what they hear, see, and do. Good trainings provide opportunities for people to actually practice (under supervision) the work they'll be doing in order to ensure it's being done correctly.

Who Does the Training?

One thing we hear a lot from animal organizations is that they don't have the staff to do the trainings. This should not be a barrier to putting together an excellent training program. We both utilize volunteer trainers in our programs to train our other volunteers.

With input from staff, volunteers, and the volunteer program manager, a curriculum can be developed that covers all of the items the group decides are critical, and volunteers can be trained to deliver the content in the most effective ways possible, freeing up staff to do their own work.

Regardless of who does the trainings, the material must be developed in such a way that it can be delivered consistently no matter who is leading the training. This means finding trainers who are good at training, who enjoy it, and who view it as a fun opportunity rather than a chore. It also means creating a script of some sort that everyone can follow, which eliminates the possibility that impor-

tant things are left out or that too much time will be spent on one thing over another.

Types of Training

People learn differently and have different preferences about how material is presented to them. Some people learn best when they hear things; others learn best when they read the material; and others learn best when they learn hands-on. The best approach to take is to develop a training plan that incorporates all of these elements so you can meet the needs of a wide range of learners.

Once the material is outlined, the next step is to focus on how best to deliver each piece of content. Some elements of the training are great to have in a written manual and touched upon briefly in a verbal presentation. Other things might need to be shown. For example, if you have volunteers who will be doing laundry or dishes, it's likely to be more effective to show someone how to set up the sink and operate the dishwasher than to explain it in a step-by-step instruction sheet.

The size of the program might also inform the training format. In a smaller program, it might be possible to do one-on-one trainings, or to put a small group of trainees with the trainer in a group setting. With larger programs, a classroom setting might be a more effective way to train bigger groups of people at the same time. While it can be more efficient to train in large groups, it's important to keep in mind that the content needs to be the guide: It's a challenge to show 20 people at once how to work the washing machine.

There are lots of ways trainings can work; there is no one right way to do it. Each organization needs to make a decision about what will best suit its own structure and the goals of the program. The critical part is that it gets done, and done well.

At Hilary's shelter, volunteers attend a general orientation, and then are assigned to trainings for the volunteer opportunity in which they plan to participate. Anyone who will ever handle a dog at the shelter must attend a class on safe dog handling; anyone who will ever touch a cat attends one on safe cat handling. The courses include an introduction to animal body language and behavior, how to read the animals' paperwork, how to handle the animals safely, how to get the animals in and out of their kennels or cages,

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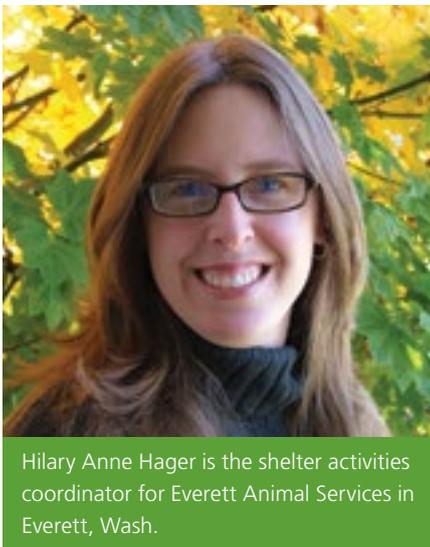
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Megan Webb is the director of Oakland Animal Services in California.



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

and how to train and socialize the animals during their stay.

Following the safe-handling classes, volunteers attend the training relevant for their position; they either attend a feline or canine training class, and/or another one-on-one, on-the-job training session. These trainings cover how to sign in and out of the shelter, how to prepare for the shift, how to complete all the tasks on the shift, and how to answer all of the frequently asked questions they'll encounter. All volunteers must also complete a one-hour observation shift at the front counter so they'll know what a "day in the life" of staff can be like. At each stage of the training, the volunteer trainers can report back to Hilary if they feel the trainee is having difficulty learning the material or if they are behaving in a way that is a cause for concern.

Each of the trainings described have visual elements (handouts, demonstrations, PowerPoint presentations, or written documentation), and an oral presentation with plenty of opportunities to ask questions and quiz the trainees to assess their comprehension. The sessions also have hands-on elements where volunteers can practice getting a dog or cat out of the cage or kennel, or walking a dog with appropriate leash-handling techniques.

Some of the basic things volunteers need to know can be covered in a volunteer orientation or handbook, including volunteer policies and required commitment; organizational mission, vision, and values; and grievance procedures, termination policies, etc. Any informational handouts the organization uses to share information with the public should also be provided to volunteers to help them understand adoption policies, what the organization does, and anything else they're likely to be asked in their role.

Making it Stick

No matter what type of training program is implemented for the volunteers, it only works if they're actually learning. At every stage of the process, it's important to check with the trainees to make sure they understand what's being said. A great way to do that in a classroom setting is to take breaks from content delivery to ask questions of the class, or to ask students to demonstrate how to do a particular task. If trainees are working with men-

tors, it's important that the trainees not only observe the correct way to do it, but that they also do the task with the mentor watching and available to give feedback and answer questions. It might also be worth considering developing a quiz.

At Hilary's shelter, an assessment has been designed that has written, oral, and hands-on elements to gauge how prepared junior volunteers are to work independently. The next step will be to develop this type of assessment for all volunteers; if the teens aren't getting it right, it's likely other folks won't, either.

Another useful tool is a checklist of training items for volunteers and their trainers to mark; it represents an agreement that the content was taught by the trainer and received by the trainee. In the event a volunteer claims to have not learned something, you will then have documentation that they acknowledged receipt of the information, which can come in handy in the event of a disciplinary action.

Finally, we highly recommend that the training be part of the application process to be a volunteer. You need to actually see a volunteer in action and doing the work to see if they are going to be successful in the position. It's important to make this clear at the outset and inform potential volunteers that the training process is a way to see if the volunteer position is a good fit for them. Too often shelters bring in people to volunteer who aren't right and can't or won't follow the training, but feel that they can't ask them to leave after they've started.

All of these steps require some effort on the part of volunteer managers and the organizations they serve. It might feel like an overwhelming task, but the benefits are such that agencies can't afford not to do the structural work required to make the program succeed. Stepping back from the hectic day-to-day to accomplish this type of analysis and program development will produce incredible dividends and benefit the program immeasurably. You just need to be willing to take the first step. **AS**

Go to animalsheltering.org/volunteer_skills for a chart that will help you determine necessary skills and training for your volunteer positions.

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Meet the REAL Slum Dogs of India

A British photographer captures the daily lives of the subcontinent's street dogs

BY JIM BAKER

When she left England in 2007 to travel through India, Eloise Leyden knew she'd see street dogs. She'd traveled in Asia and Central America in the past, and seen the profusion of stray animals who roam many city streets. She planned to put her newly minted degree in photography to good use by undertaking a project that would give her trip to the subcontinent more meaning.

"So I had it in my head that I would concentrate my camera on the stray dogs, and so I got there, and the more I was photographing them, the more I sort of fell in love with them ... but I never anticipated that I would get so involved in their actual place in India, the situation that is out there, and how they can be helped," Leyden says.

Through a chance encounter in Pushkar—a city in the Indian state of Rajasthan—Leyden heard about the work of Tree of Life for Animals (TOLFA), a non-profit group that runs an animal hospital and shelter in the city. Founded by fellow Briton Rachel Wright, TOLFA's goal is to take steps to humanely control the dog population through spay/neuter programs and provide veterinary care to any animal who needs it—especially street dogs.

Leyden spent three days at TOLFA's compound, helping to take care of its permanent residents (at that time, about 20 dogs, as well as cats, cows, and goats) and photographing the animals, then left to continue her travels around the country.

But the shelter stayed in her mind as she continued taking photos while making friends with the dogs, learning to love them, and seeing "their spirit and their personality and the hard life they live," she says. "And yet so many of them, all they really wanted was a big cuddle, and if I had a *chapathi* [Indian flatbread], then all the better."



Sharda Chandeliya, a staff member at TOLFA, prepares the daily food for the former street dogs living at the sanctuary in Pushkar, Rajasthan. The happy guy on her lap is permanent resident, Squirrel.

Change is slow to come, especially in a society plagued with other problems; more than once, Leyden's lens captured people living on the street in conditions little better than that of the dogs. And the dogs have lived this way for hundreds of years. "They're hardy, they're survivors, and they bear the scars of their survival," Leyden says. "I didn't want people to see the book and go, 'Oh, isn't it dreadful?' I wanted to get across that it's just part of life out there, and that actually it's kind of beautiful in a way. You have to leave your perceptions at home, and just see it for what it is."

But while she recognized the reality, Leyden still wanted to help. Later in her trip, she returned to TOLFA, this time spending a month feeding and walking those dogs who, due to illness or infirmity, will live the rest of their lives at the shelter.

Upon returning to England, Leyden decided to shape her photos into a book. The result was quickly picked up by a publishing house, where it became *Slum*

Dogs of India (Merrell Publishers Limited, 2009). A portion of the proceeds from the sale of each book is donated to TOLFA; Leyden now serves as one of the organization's trustees.

Leyden says two huge things must happen to improve the situation of India's street dogs: India must find a way to reduce the trash that litters the streets, providing an endless supply of food; and spay/neuter programs must be established nationwide.

She found that the attitude of Indians toward street dogs ranges from indifference to hostility to the occasional gesture of kindness—a scrap of food tossed their way. But they are such a normal part of the fabric of Indian life that, for most people, they simply fade into the landscape.

Maybe her book, depicting the dogs as the individuals that they are, will help to change that.

To learn more about Leyden's photography, visit her website at eloiseleyden.co.uk. To learn more about TOLFA, visit tolfa.org.uk. 





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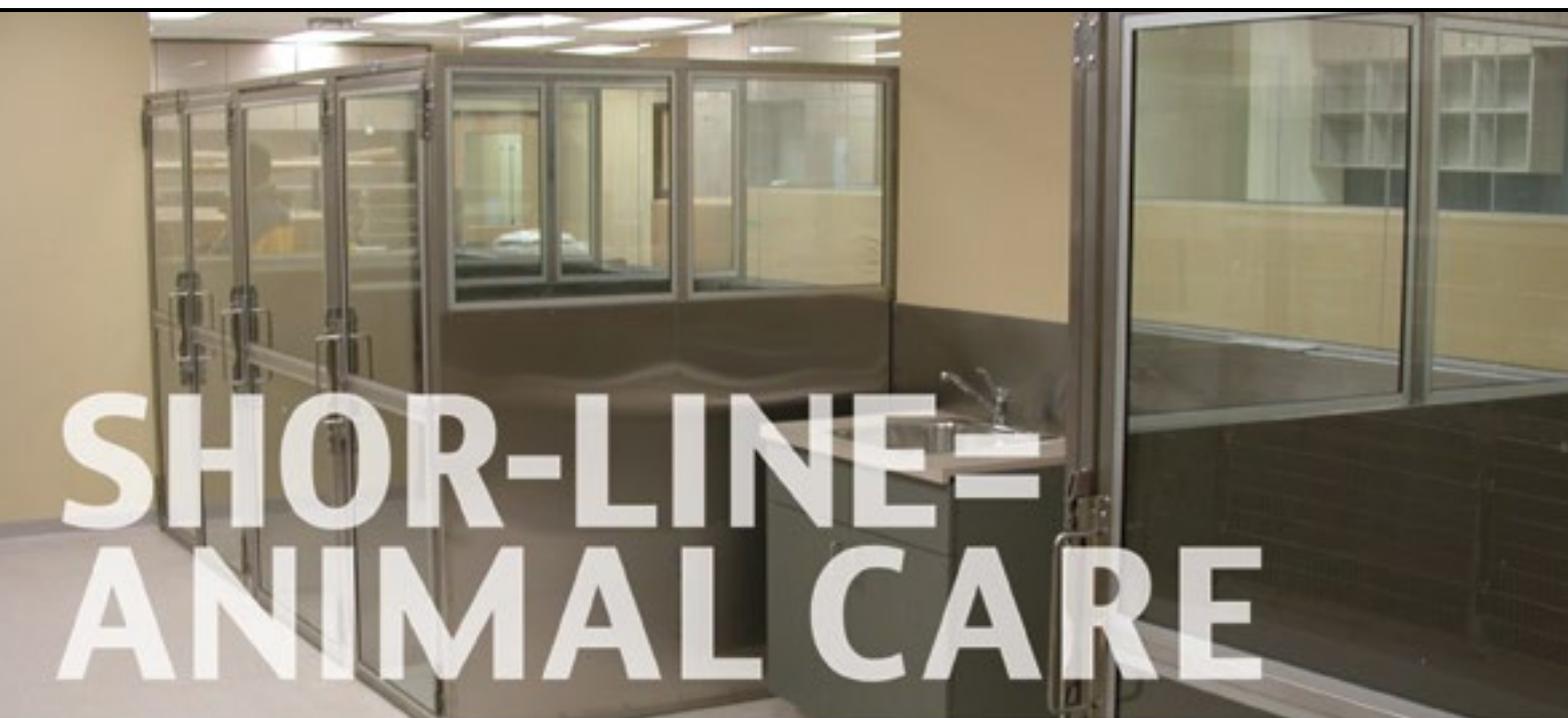


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