

# ANIMAL Sheltering

November/December 2010

The Magazine for Animal Care Professionals and Volunteers



## Rescued from Squalor

Inside a Hoarding Seizure

Rehabilitating Puppy Mill Dogs

Enlisting Vets in the Spay/Neuter Mission



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# ANIMAL Sheltering

The Magazine for Animal Care Professionals and Volunteers



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## Rescued from Squalor

Even when faced with overwhelming evidence that the animals in their care are suffering, hoarders often cannot stop collecting more. Rooted in mental illness, hoarders' behavior warrants compassion—but stopping them will often require prosecution. Through the lens of one hoarding seizure, we look at the phenomenon of hoarding, and explore ways that even smaller shelters can prepare to handle a major case.

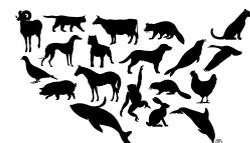


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## Making Spay/Neuter an Inside Job

A program in Oklahoma provides a model for how subsidized spay/neuter can be made more widely available to low-income residents, through cooperative efforts with local veterinarians in private practice.

**ALSO:**  
Puppy mill dogs often arrive at shelters sick, filthy, and burdened with behavioral issues due to months or even years of living in atrocious conditions. Experienced staffers at shelters around the country have figured out ways to socialize and rehabilitate these special-needs dogs.  
**The 101 Department, p.36**



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## 5 Letterbox

## 6 Scoop

Dog transports relieve pressure on Louisiana shelters flooded with surrendered pets after the Deep Horizon oil spill; a raid on a puppy mill changes the course of a Washington state sheriff's career; an animal services unit in Texas teams up with a sympathetic trucker to get a vagabond dog home; a tattoo-and-piercing fundraiser garners thousands of dollars for a North Carolina shelter; and more.

## 20 Coffee Break

In your space, you told us how your organization makes its facilities more appealing to the public. Do you decorate your lobby? Deodorize your kennels? Disguise ugly parts of the building?

## 36 The "101" Department

If you were suddenly faced with caring for scores of filthy, frightened puppy mill dogs, what do you do? Where do you even *begin*? Some shelters would understandably freak out, but others around the country have years of experience dealing with this, and they've developed methods to rehabilitate and socialize these special pets, turning them into companion animals that people will line up to adopt.

## 43 Q & A

In her book *Saving Gracie*, journalist Carol Bradley traces the journey of one dog—initially known only as "No. 132"—from her sad origins at a puppy mill, to her seizure by caring humane officers, and ultimately into the loving arms of an adopter.

## 47 Humane Law Forum

Animals are still considered property in every state in the country. But how do you know whether the person at your front desk is the animal's legal owner? What documentation do you require in order to take in—and potentially adopt out—a surrendered animal? It's worthwhile to consider your shelter's procedures so you can head off potential problems.

## 51 Behavior Department

The more friendly shelter cats seem, the more likely it is that people will interact with them, which can lead to adoptions. But what about all the feral and fearful cats who don't meet adoptability criteria and are less likely to find a home?

## 60 Off Leash

Christmas can be the loneliest day of the year for chained dogs, but a small group of officers at the Washington Humane Society have a holiday tradition of making sure these canines know they're not forgotten.



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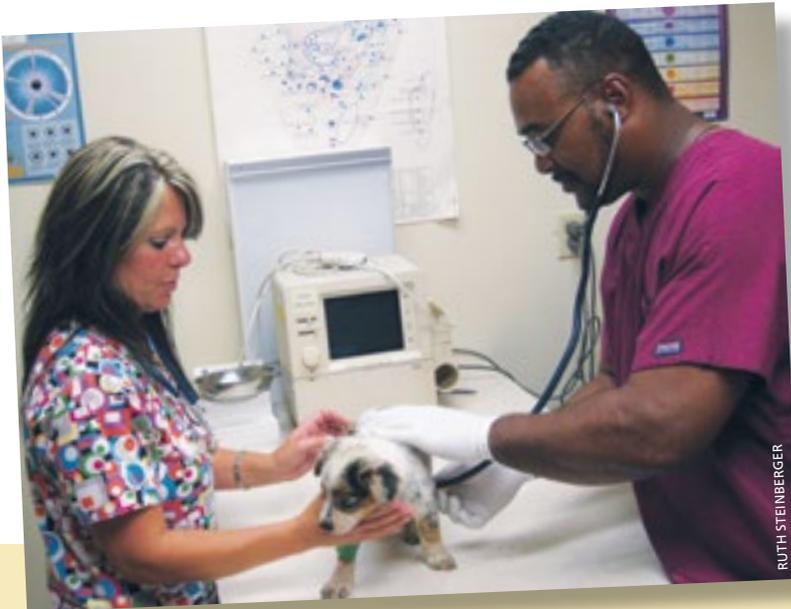


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People often ask where we get our story ideas. Some of them come from brainstorming with Companion Animals staff here at The Humane Society of the United States about what calls they're getting from shelters and rescue groups; others come from checking around with shelter leaders to see what they're doing. But many of them—at least four stories in this issue, for example—came directly from readers who called or e-mailed to pitch a story or to let us know that they were working on something interesting.

We encourage you to do the same: If your organization has an approach that's improved life for homeless animals in your community, tell us about it! Those are the stories we want to share.

## A Fan of Cat-Tagging

I enjoyed reading the article in *Animal Sheltering* called "Collars and Sense" (July-August 2010, p. 24). It especially moved me because in my community, we have had a "leash law" on the books for cats since the late 1990s, as well as a mandatory license and ID for felines. Our confinement requirements for cats are the same [as those] for dogs, although we don't recommend placing a cat

In this issue, we feature an in-depth look at one major hoarding case in Mississippi, along with practical tips for agencies trying to cope with this complex and challenging issue. We also take a look at how one Oklahoma community has increased the availability of spay/neuter in its area; how shelters can help prepare dogs seized from puppy mills for new homes; the importance of establishing ownership upon surrender; and a unique approach to helping feral and fearful cats become friendlier. We hope you'll find them useful—and that you'll be inspired to share your own ideas with the *Animal Sheltering* community.

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

on a leash or on a tie-out, even temporarily. But we do recommend keeping your cat safely confined to the interior of your home, or erecting an escape-proof enclosure for your cat if they are to go outside. We also require that all cats wear their city license tag (which is smaller than the average rabies tag), as well as endorse microchipping for all pets.

The intake rates for cats in our city are about the same as they are for dogs, because

of our active enforcement of the confinement laws. However, only a small number of our cats find their way back home. Luckily, our adoption rate for cats and kittens is higher than average, about 80 percent, thanks to a transfer program that has been in place for years with neighboring shelters.

It is so disheartening when I hear all the excuses for why a cat can't wear a collar. My personal pet cat has worn collars and tags for nearly 10 years without incident, and Jezebel, the cat who lives at our shelter, has worn a collar since 2004 with a rabies tag, city license, and an ID tag (she arrived at the shelter *sans* collar or any ID), so I can't understand why anyone would think it was dangerous to put a collar on a cat.

To have to euthanize even one cat because it wasn't wearing ID is one too many for my standards; I pray for the day when society will agree with me. Thanks for the article.

Tricia Power, Director  
Bryant Animal Control & Adoption Center  
Bryant, Ark.

## Coffee Break Winner Treats Others

Thank you for the nod in *Animal Sheltering* (Coffee Break, July-August 2010, p. 23). I just wanted to let you know that I used the Starbucks card to make \$10 gift certificates that were used for a fundraising event for Mixed Breeds in Need. We held a fun run for people, dog agility trials, and had booths set up from local rescue groups. It was a great event. The \$10 certificates were used as prizes. Again, thank you so much!

Andrea MacDonald  
Mixed Breeds in Need  
Huntington, N.Y.

**Editor's note:** These letters were great reminders (we get them regularly) of how awesome our readers are! Keep them coming: Write to us at [asm@humanesociety.org](mailto:asm@humanesociety.org).

## In Oil Spill's Wake, Increased Surrenders

Transport of dogs relieves pressure on two overwhelmed Louisiana shelters

BY JIM BAKER



MICHELLE RILEY/THE HSUS

HSUS staffer Sara Varsa, deputy director of emergency services (on the truck), and Anne Arundel SPCA director of operations Robin Small unload one of 33 dogs transported from the St. Bernard Parish Animal Shelter and the Plaquemines Animal Welfare Society in Louisiana.

**When you think of those affected** by the Gulf Coast oil spill, you may envision of fishermen put out of work by the disaster, or of residents watching their beautiful coastline globbed with tar balls—or perhaps even of nonhuman victims, like the pelicans and dolphins sickened by the sludge.

But, in an eerie echo of Hurricane Katrina five years ago, you can add others to the list of those deeply affected by the tragedy: pets and their people.

In the summer, as oil continued to spew from the Deepwater Horizon well, many Louisiana residents began surrendering their pets to local animal shelters. It's difficult to determine how many of these pet owners depend on the Gulf of Mexico to earn their living—whether by fishing, working in the oil industry, or catering to tourists. But officials at animal welfare organizations in the state say they believe the oil spill played a direct role in the high numbers of animals who were given up.

Shelters in the coastal parishes of St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Jefferson, and Terrebonne were inundated with a wave of relinquished pets. Those shelters experienced two to three times the number of relinquishments in the summer of 2010 compared to a year earlier, according to Ana Zorrilla, chief executive officer of the Louisiana SPCA, based in New Orleans.

“Knowing how bonded people are with their pets, it’s heartbreaking to hear of families having to make this kind of decision,” Zorrilla says, noting that pets are known to reduce stress and help people overcome depression. “The pets have become innocent victims of this disaster.”

Beth Brewster, director of the St. Bernard Parish Animal Shelter in Violet, witnessed the surge at her facility. Pet owners surrendered 117 animals in June 2010—up from 17 in June 2009. The May numbers were even worse: The municipal, open-admission shelter took in 288 pets that month, compared to 60 in May 2009.

“The overall thing that I’m hearing is the economy, the uncertainty of the future,” Brewster says. Many parish residents are fishermen, “and they feel like it’s going to be years before it’s back to what it was. So a lot of people are downsizing, moving to apartments. ... I’ve never seen an influx of highly adoptable pets like we’ve had.”

To try to relieve some of the pressure, in late June, The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) transported 33 dogs from Brewster’s shelter and the Plaquemines Animal Welfare Society (PAWS), located in Belle Chasse, a short drive from New Orleans.

The dogs took a long ride from Louisiana to The HSUS offices in Gaithersburg, Md., where they were picked up by staff from animal shelters and rescue groups in Maryland and Virginia, and taken to their facilities to be placed for adoption. Loudoun County Animal Shelter, in Waterford, Va.; the SPCA of Anne Arundel

County, in Annapolis, Md.; and the Lost Dog and Cat Foundation, based in Arlington, Va., all stepped up to take in and place the dogs.

Sarah Barnett, emerging media manager for The HSUS and a longtime volunteer for the Lost Dog and Cat Foundation, helped coordinate the June transport and find shelters willing to help. She also made the trip to the two Louisiana shelters, and says it was easy to see they were facing a tough situation. "PAWS looked really crowded. Every room had dogs in it, kennels on top of each other. Everybody was taken good care of, but you could tell that they were just struggling to get any dogs out," she says.

When Sue Beatty, executive director of the SPCA of Anne Arundel County, got an e-mail from Barnett asking if her organization could take some of the dogs, Beatty was eager to assist, offering room for 10 of them. "I know the shelters in the Gulf Coast area are feeling the strain, with more pets being surrendered and more strays, and we just felt that since we had the space, we wanted to help out," she says.

The decision to accept some of the dogs was an easy one for Thomas Koenig, director of the Loudoun County Animal Shelter. His agency had enjoyed a comparatively light intake of dogs in the spring and summer, so there was extra room in the shelter for 11 of the Louisiana pets. Plus, Koenig says, it was simply an opportunity to step up and support two shelters that needed help. "We actually did two trips during Hurricane Katrina, when we brought dogs back from that area. ... [The dogs from the June transport] have such a fantastic story, and we have such a great community that wants to help, that we don't think there's going to be any problem getting them moved out pretty quickly."

The odds looked daunting that the dogs would have been adopted had they stayed in the Louisiana shelters, due to the sheer numbers of pets coming in. Barnett and Jacob Stroman, director of PAWS, were struggling to come up with a final list of dogs from his shelter who would be put on the transport, and Stroman suggested a toy poodle and a Yorkie mix as potential candidates. "I said to him, 'I don't want to take all your adoptable

## Animal Sheltering Online

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- Go to [animalsheltering.org/mouthpieces](http://animalsheltering.org/mouthpieces) to download a poster encouraging people to consider adopting black dogs and cats.
- To learn more about training methods designed to make frightened cats more adoptable—discussed in our Behavior Department—check out Animal Sheltering's article "Scaredy Cat or Feral Cat?" at [animalsheltering.org/frightened\\_ferals](http://animalsheltering.org/frightened_ferals); and "The Way to Tame a Feral Kitten's Heart," at [animalsheltering.org/taming\\_feral\\_kittens](http://animalsheltering.org/taming_feral_kittens).

dogs," says Barnett, "and he said, 'Honestly, they've got just as much of a chance here as a pit bull.' And that kind of struck me."

The June transport, which took 19 dogs from St. Bernard and 14 dogs from PAWS, was a true lifesaver for the animals. "They were such awesome dogs," Brewster says. "But our intake has been so incredible ... the relief at just knowing they're going to a good, safe place, it took a load off the whole staff."

The transport helped relieve some of the pressure at the PAWS shelter too, according to Stroman—but that little bit of breathing room didn't last long, he says. "Within an hour and a half, I had to fill all those spaces." **AS**

*In early August, The HSUS went south again, teaming up with the Louisiana SPCA to transport about 100 dogs from nine overwhelmed shelters and rescue groups to St. Hubert's Animal Welfare Center in Madison, N.J. The majority of dogs were made available for adoption at St. Hubert's, while others were placed with partnering agencies across the state.*



MICHELLE RILEY/THE HSUS

A puppy transported from Louisiana to Maryland gets a cuddle from Sarah Barnett, emerging media manager for The Humane Society of the United States and longtime volunteer for the Lost Dog and Cat Foundation in Arlington, Va.

[scoop]

## For Better and For Worse

Which volunteer management practices make for happy employees?



**Volunteers are the lifeblood** of many a nonprofit organization. But what if the volunteers—through no fault of their own—think, speak, or behave in ways that make the actual paid employees crazy?

If this description sounds familiar, your shelter may be helping itself with one hand but hurting itself with the other. Staff's bad experiences with volunteers can turn the life-saving work volunteers can do into a major

headache, one that can actually undermine the mission of an animal shelter.

A recent study in the journal *Nonprofit Management & Leadership* aimed to shed some light on the management practices that can affect employees' attitudes toward volunteers. The researchers analyzed responses gleaned from surveying 270 animal shelter employees who work with volunteers to examine how their organizations' volunteer management practices affected the employees' rating of their experience with volunteers.

Respondents rated the volunteers they work with on how well they matched certain descriptions ("lazy," "hard-working," etc.). They also responded to questions about whether their organizations used certain volunteer management practices—for example, having a designated volunteer coordinator, a mandatory training for volunteers, job descriptions for volunteer positions, and

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so forth. Survey respondents also answered questions about their stress levels, workload, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction, among others.

"Overall," the researchers write, "the ratings were quite positive. More than 80 percent of employees described volunteers as hard-working, helpful, friendly, and kind to a 'good' or 'great' extent." But, they note, there were downsides as well: Only 50 to 60 percent of employees said that volunteers know what they're doing, or are open-minded, well-trained, and independent to a good or great percent.

While it's easy to think of volunteer practices as a problem that can sit on the back burner while more pressing issues are dealt with, the researchers point out that employee views have a larger effect. Negative feelings about volunteers were predictive "of personal and attachment-related outcomes; namely, employees with poor experiences with volunteers reported being more stressed, overworked, and less committed to the organization." Ineffective volunteers can have an effect that goes beyond the mere incompleteness of tasks assigned to them, negatively impacting the organization's mission.

Since employee experience with volunteers can have such ramifications, how can groups achieve better outcomes? The researchers point to the efficacy of certain management practices: Respondents reported better experiences "when their organization had any (and especially all)" of the following factors:

- mandatory structured volunteer training
- a volunteer performance evaluation system
- a formal policy for handling volunteer problems
- a policy for dealing with employee-volunteer conflict
- formal volunteer recruitment efforts
- an interview or screening process for the "hiring" of volunteers
- social gatherings to promote volunteer-employee interactions.

To read the full report and see further recommendations and conclusions, see "Employee Experiences with Volunteers: Assessment, Description, Antecedents and Outcomes," by Steven G. Rogelberg et al, published in *Nonprofit Management & Leadership* (Vol. 20, No. 4). —CA 

## Are YOU a Hoarder?

Are you stockpiling your copies of *Animal Sheltering*? Are your shelves piling up with dusty copies? Do you struggle to care for your back issues? If so, you may be a magazine hoarder.

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If, on the other hand, your shelter suffers from the opposite problem and you need more copies of the magazine, don't forget that we offer bulk discounts for those ordering two or more subscriptions. We also offer great deals for groups hosting animal welfare conferences. The more you order, the cheaper it gets—so you can get copies for your kennel staff, your volunteers, even that city council member who keeps telling you he doesn't get what's so difficult about "dogcatching."

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## Homeless in Paradise: Helping Mexico's Strays

The tropics aren't all sun and fun for animals, but local groups are lending a hand



ISLA ANIMALS

Alison Current comforts a dog treated at one of the clinics held by Isla Animals. Strays on the island have often faced mass roundups and inhumane killing methods, but Current's group is working to change that.

**For thousands of spring breakers** and vacationers, Cancun and its neighboring towns along the eastern coast of Mexico mean sun, surf, and sipping tequila. But many visitors who arrive to play and relax get a surprise: The areas along the coast of the Yucatan peninsula are startling not only for their beauty, but for the poverty that's all-too-apparent in areas beyond the luxurious resorts and white beaches.

As with most places coping with economic disadvantages, the animal population suffers alongside the human one. And some of the people who've arrived planning to do little more than lie on a beach feel compelled to try to help.

You can count Alison and Jeff Current among them. When the couple moved to Isla Mujeres—a small island northeast of

Cancun—their children were grown, and the Currents planned to enjoy life and build a new home. They didn't expect they'd come to share that home with a rotating cast of 20 or 30 of the island's stray puppies.

"Stray animals aren't good for the tourist industry," Alison Current says. "When things get bad enough, the government's answer is mass roundups. Often times it's the nicer, trusting dogs, maybe pets, that get picked up. The strays run and hide in the woods." Sadly, these dogs typically face poisoning or other inhumane forms of killing.

Current's work started with a bookstore that took in some local strays. "When the store closed for the day, the puppies would make a mess and cause problems. I told the owners I'd take the puppies at night, and bring them back in the day so people could

come to see them and adopt them," chuckles Current. "And here I am today!"

Her efforts soon evolved into Isla Animals, an organization dedicated to reducing the population of homeless dogs on Isla Mujeres and nearby areas on the mainland. Now in its 10th year, the group has helped nearly 4,500 dogs, including dogs sent to new homes in the U.S., strays rehomed within Mexico, and pets lucky enough to have Current knock on their owners' doors.

"In the poorer regions, I go house to house and check on the dogs and cats. If I find a sick animal, I will give them medicine and keep checking until they are well. A dog's life in Mexico is traditionally very short without some sort of intervention," Current explains.

Isla Animals started as a shelter, but soon realized the answer was in spay/neuter, says Current, who says she knows a lot of vets and "doggy people" in the area who help out. She pays local vets a small amount for performing surgeries. When new vets arrive from other areas, she invites them along for training, valuable to a vet just out of school.

Isla Animals focuses its efforts on routine spay/neuter clinics and owner education. The group's approach varies from one community to the next, Current says, but typically it sets up portable clinics at churches, community centers, or simply under tents. Volunteers bring in patients through a variety of methods, including public outreach and by personally rounding up strays.

At a clinic in a Mayan region two hours west of Cancun, the group "put together about \$8 worth of staples—rice, flour. We gave one to each person who brought their dog [for sterilization]. That was a very respectful community with deep ties to the church," Current says. "In other areas, that kind of offer might cause people to go out and steal a dog to bring to us."

### A Better Image for Animals

In addition to reducing the population, Current tries to improve the standing of the island's dogs. "We make a big deal about the dogs, especially to children. We'll tell them, 'What a great dog! Give your dog a hug for

me!’ We want to raise awareness, help them to honor their dogs.”

Once, a high school girl brought in a sick, starving stray she found roadside. The dog had abdominal swelling, and Current says they thought she might be pregnant. “It turned out she had a tumor. Tumor surgery isn’t done much in this area. A vet from New York who helps me out, Dr. Ina Obernesser, offered to do the surgery, so we took Carla [to New York for the surgery], and she soon got well,” Current reports happily. “But here’s the best part of the story: Carla was adopted [in New York] and lives in a huge house, with a pool, tennis court. They send me photos, and Carla lives like a star!”

Current is quick to thank the group’s many volunteers and partnering organizations, one of which is Cats & Dogs International (CANDI). Isla Animals has partnered with CANDI for many spay/neuter clinics, and Current says that Darci Galati, the organization’s president, has helped arrange transports of dogs and puppies to areas in the States where there are actually “shortages” of adoptable dogs. Pet Project Rescue, a Minnesota rescue group, has also helped find homes for dogs in the States.

“We met Alison in December 2007 ... we wanted to do something to support her efforts. She needed more outlets in the U.S. to which dogs could be flown, so we decided to see what we could do,” says Maia Rumpho-Stellpflug, director and founder of Pet Project Rescue. The group has since found homes for about 70 Mexican dogs.

Current feels lucky to be able to help. “I love what I do,” she says. “It can break your heart, but I love it.”

## Caring for Beach Kitties

Across the bay from Isla Mujeres, down the coast in the Riviera Maya region, you’ll find the artsy, low-key beach town of Playa del Carmen. You’ll also see plenty of stray and feral cats—but thanks to organized feedings and spay/neuter by Coco’s Cat Rescue, the animals have an ally.

Away from the grounds of restaurants and resorts, Coco’s set up an area called the Cat Café, which provides an organized feeding station where these colonies of sterilized cats can live without interfering with tourism. The concept was developed by the

World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) in an effort to discourage stray cats from congregating around resort areas, where food is plentiful, and well-meaning tourists are happy to share. When the situation gets out of control, hotels often want to get rid of the cats, and may use inhumane means to do so.

When that happens, other cats soon take the place of the cats removed. “It becomes a never-ending story,” says Laura Raikes, who founded Coco’s Cat Rescue and brought the Cat Café concept to the Sandos Caracol Eco Resort & Spa in Playa del Carmen. She oversees two cafés, and plans to add more following the high tourist season.

Raikes moved to Mexico in 2002; her own beloved cat, Coco, died after being struck by an automobile. Believing that local drivers are careless about strays and wanting to help the many stray and feral cats she’d seen in the area, Raikes launched the rescue in March 2009 and named it in honor of her fallen pet.

Today, Coco’s Cat Rescue focuses on spaying and neutering stray and feral cats—the group has support from many local volunteers and veterinarians—and on rescuing and rehoming young kittens. The group also tries to educate and assist owners who couldn’t otherwise afford spay/neuter surgery. To date, the group has found homes for 280 kittens.

Coco’s has built up many partnerships, including one with ViDAS (Spanish for “lives”), a nonprofit organization of veterinarians, veterinary students, and others dedicated to improving the lives of animals and people through veterinary medicine and education. Coco’s partnership with ViDAS has resulted in an annual, extensive spay/neuter event, operating on more than 100 animals a day for six days. “I am impressed and stunned daily by the volunteers that share my passion for these animals in need. I could not do this work alone,” says Raikes.

Also with the help of ViDAS, Coco’s recently opened a permanent clinic. Raikes, her husband Carlos, and other volunteers renovated the building, which includes play areas for kittens and rooms for quarantine. At the clinic, the group operates on cats and dogs six days a week, at greatly reduced costs to owners and often for free.



This sweet dog didn’t mind nursing some stray hungry kittens when the animals ended up together at a Mexican impoundment facility. All were slated for euthanasia, but Coco’s took them in and found them homes.



When volunteers from Isla Animals go around the island to help local pets and strays, they tend to get a lot of attention from the younger generation.

Raikes is happy to see the work having an effect. “Slowly, we are able to educate owners, one by one. ... Owners want to know what is needed to keep their animal healthy. As more low-income families have been able to sterilize their pet, friends and family do the same,” says Raikes.

One of her favorite stories involves a dog and three kittens who were at a local impound facility. Hearing they were going to be euthanized, Coco’s showed up to take them in. “When we arrived at the clinic, we found the kittens, nursing from the dog!” Raikes says.

Coco’s took in the cross-species family and kept them together until the kittens were weaned and ready for adoption. A family adopted the kind-hearted dog and named her Esperanza—the Spanish word for hope. 



## Choosing a New Path

After assisting with a major puppy mill raid, a longtime sheriff plans to switch to animal control

**In his long and varied career** in law enforcement, Larry Taylor has dealt with some of the ugliest situations imaginable. He's worked homicides, sex crimes, and drug enforcement during his 34 years as a cop, the last 12 of which he's spent as the elected sheriff of Benton County in southeastern Washington state.

But Taylor says he'd never seen anything like what he witnessed in Kennewick, Wash., in May 2009, when he took part in a raid that rescued 371 miniature American Eskimo dogs from a puppy mill. He saw dogs kept in shopping carts, and puppies confined to old apple crates half full of dirt and feces. Cages had no protection from the elements; in some cases, they held more than one dog and were so small that some dogs' flesh was growing into the wiring, Taylor recalls.

When he stuck his hand into one of the cages, the puppies clung to his arm "like flies clinging to a no-pest strip. ... They had their front paws wrapped around my arm, clinging to my arm with a death grip and whining, while their little tails were wiggling like a propeller with joy. When I pulled my arm out of the cage, I literally had to shake the puppies off my arm; they definitely did not want to let go. The impression that was clear to me was they were finally rescued from the horror that they had been living in." Taylor says the experience absolutely tore him apart.

Fast-forward to summer 2010, and the sheriff's career has taken a surprising twist.

Taylor, who had expected to run unopposed for a fourth four-year term as sheriff this fall, decided to not seek reelection. Instead, on Jan. 1, he'll turn in his sheriff's badge to manage the new 32-kennel Benton County Animal Control Facility—a dogs-only shelter that will serve the unincorporated portion of the county, a region that comprises the bulk of its 1,722-square-miles yet has never had animal control services. The shelter will cost \$820,000 to build, and Taylor will have an annual operating budget of about \$235,000, covering salaries and benefits for himself and his one animal control officer, as well as the costs of running the facility.



CORRY MILLANI/THE HSUS

Sheriff Larry Taylor of Benton County holds one of 371 miniature American Eskimo dogs seized during a puppy mill raid in Washington state in May 2009. After participating in the raid, Taylor eventually decided to leave law enforcement and become manager of the county's new shelter for dogs.

Taylor expects his new job to be incredibly busy, stressful, and radically different from his current one. He's taking a big pay cut—his salary will drop from \$106,500 to \$72,000—and instead of the 227 people who make up his current department, he'll have a single employee. He estimates his new annual budget will be equal to the money allotted to run the sheriff's office for about four days.

Taylor acknowledges that some people consider his new job a step down, but his view is that he's had a long career as a law officer, and now it's time for him to do some-

thing that's both completely different and vitally important. He'll be laying the foundation for animal control in the unincorporated portion of Benton County, which is plagued by stray dogs who form packs and harass livestock. Currently, when people in the region call the sheriff's office about stray or abandoned dogs, deputies have to tell them they have no resources to help, he says.

Taylor, who will turn 55 by the end of his current term, doesn't plan to work in animal control for decades. He expects to stick with it for a maximum of seven years, and hopes

to establish a structure that will continue after he's gone. "It'll be a wonderful legacy to leave behind," says Taylor, a lifelong animal lover who grew up in the area, "and how wonderful is that?"

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) assisted the sheriff's office with the puppy mill raid. Dan Paul, Washington state director for the organization, says Taylor was clearly committed to ensuring the dogs' welfare and publicizing the mill's deplorable conditions. "I think the event spoke to him," Paul says.

Taylor views the raid—which also involved PetSmart Charities, county officials, local veterinarians, shelters, and rescue volunteers—as a tremendous success. The puppy mill owner pleaded guilty to one count of first-degree animal cruelty, a felony, and nine counts of second-degree animal cruelty, which are misdemeanors. A county judge sentenced her to 90 days on a work crew and forbade her from owning animals for the next five years, according to news reports. And not only did the raid save the lives of the 371 Eskimo dogs (only five had to be euthanized, for medical reasons), it also prompted the county commissioners to fund animal control and build the new shelter.

Taylor expects the facility to be finished by late December and fully operational by early January. He's writing the policies and procedures, and has become a certified euthanasia technician. He's hired his lone employee, who'll pick up stray and abandoned dogs in the county; he's arranged for local inmates to clean the facility. He expects the kennels to fill up quickly, but still hopes to create a shelter where dogs are euthanized only upon a veterinarian's recommendation or a court or law enforcement order. With a limited staff and operating budget, he says he'll be looking for donations and volunteers. He believes his biggest challenge will be getting dogs adopted out or turned over to rescue groups. He hopes to have every dog spayed or neutered before adoption, but currently has no budget for such a program; he has set up an account with the county treasurer's office and is soliciting donations.

The plan to bring animal control to unincorporated Benton County encountered a few stumbling blocks, Taylor acknowledges.



The scores of American Eskimo dogs and puppies rescued in the raid on the puppy mill in Benton County were kept in inhumane conditions. This dog, for example, was housed in a shopping cart. Others were confined to rusty pens caked with feces.

Proposed shelter sites were rejected for a variety of reasons before a location was secured in the city of Kennewick. Taylor's initial plan was to create an animal control division within the sheriff's office, and two county correctional officers expressed an interest in filling the allotted ACO positions. After attending animal control training in Seattle, the officers changed their minds and decided to keep their current jobs—they had the impression that serving as the shelter's two animal control officers would be too much work, even with sheriff's office personnel handling administration, according to Taylor. Finally, a local union planned to file an unfair labor practice charge if he had a union member (a lieutenant) supervising non-union ACOs.

The proposed department, now with one manager and one ACO, was moved under the commissioners, but Taylor says no one from about 850 county government employees sought the manager's position. Early this year, the county administrator chuckled when Taylor suggested he could retire as sheriff and seek the job of shelter manager.

But he wasn't kidding. He recalls telling the two correctional officers who changed their minds about working as ACOs, "It's something that's true to my heart ... I saw the pain and suffering of all these American



A mother nurses her pups in a temporary shelter at the Benton County Fairgrounds after being rescued in the raid on the puppy mill in Kennewick, Wash.

Eskimo dogs at this puppy mill. I'm not going to let this program fail." **AS**

*Donations to the new shelter's spay/neuter program may be made out to "Benton County Treasurer" and sent to Benton County Sheriff's Office, Attn: Sheriff Larry D. Taylor, 7122 W. Okanogan Place, Bldg. B, Kennewick, WA 99336.*



## Once More, With Spirit

A stray relies on the kindness of strangers to find a better home



BEAUMONT ANIMAL SERVICES UNIT

Jackson, the vagabond Weimaraner/pit bull mix who spent some quality time with the Beaumont Animal Services Unit in Texas during his cross-country travels, pauses to pose for a picture with (left to right) KFDM reporter Ashley Rodrigue, officer Dustin Carraway, and Cathy Barber, a trucker who agreed to pick up Jackson in Beaumont and drive him back to California.

The call last February reporting a stray dog at the local Marriott seemed routine enough to officer Dustin Carraway of the Beaumont Animal Services Unit here in Texas. He arrived at the hotel to find a beautiful, friendly Weimaraner/pit bull mix lounging near the pool as though it was the middle of summer rather than a chilly midwinter day. He collected the dog and transported him back to the shelter.

At the shelter, Dustin scanned him for a microchip, and the wand started beeping. This dog had a chip! In his excitement, Dustin cleared the scanner and scanned the dog a second time: nothing. No chip was coming up.

After multiple scans, Dustin came to me to see if I could scan the dog and have any better luck. After my first scan, nothing—but after a couple more scans, bingo! A chip ID number again popped up on the scanner.

We found that the chip had slid down the dog's shoulder and was not directly on top of his neck.

Officer Carraway wrote down the information and started trying to track down the dog's owner. The chip led to the Rancho Cucamonga Animal Shelter in California. It turned out that the dog's name was Jackson, and he had been adopted four days earlier by two truck drivers in Ontario, Calif. Rancho Cucamonga had held an adoption event at the Travel Centers of America, a truck stop in Ontario, during the Susanne Spirit USA Road Show, a music and talent show that's held there every Tuesday and Sunday. The adoption event was the shelter's last-ditch effort to try and find Jackson a home—at the time, the dog was just days away from euthanasia. Susanne Spirit holds adoptions at her show every weekend, helping find homes for the

dogs—many of whom get adopted by truck drivers from all over the U.S.

A couple traveling cross-country had adopted Jackson on the spot. They then headed for Florida and made a stop here in Beaumont, where Jackson jumped out of their truck and took off. They'd been unable to catch him and had to get back on the road for Florida. Jackson ended up at the Marriott Hotel—and that's when the call came to us.

After Dustin made contact with the Rancho Cucamonga Animal Shelter, the staff there contacted the adopters. They said that they were now headed for New York and could not turn around and head back to Beaumont, and they surrendered the dog over the phone back to the California shelter. But the dog was still with us in Texas.

The Rancho Cucamonga Animal Shelter contacted Susanne, who'd been upset by the whole situation. She called me here in Beaumont, and I told her not to worry, that Jackson would be safe here until she could find a way to get him back to California. Susanne was thrilled that we were willing to help save this little pup's life.

Susanne got on the phone and contacted Cathy Barber, a trucker who was sympathetic to the problem. Barber, who works for YRC



BEAUMONT ANIMAL SERVICES UNIT

Trucker Cathy Barber had plenty of time to bond with Jackson on their journey from Texas to California (with a brief stop in Chicago!). The two road warriors traveled almost 5,000 miles by the time they got to the end of their ride.

Glen Moore, based in Carlisle, Pa., was able to have all of her loads rerouted so that she could get to Beaumont and pick up Jackson to drive him back to California.

On March 1, about 18 days after Jackson was found at the hotel, Barber arrived in Beaumont. Thanks to donated services by our local PetCo, Jackson had been freshly groomed, and was given a warm farewell by myself and several animal services officers. A local video crew and reporter from KFDM recorded the whole event and aired a story about the adventure on Channel 6 news.

Barber had to make a few stops before she could get Jackson to California, so she and Jackson had plenty of time to bond. After a brief stop in Chicago they were on their way. They had traveled more than 5,000 miles when they finally arrived in Ontario, and they were treated to a welcome home party suitable for royalty. There was even a cake in Jackson's honor.

Today, Jackson is living a life of luxury with his new owner, Susanne Spirit. She fell in love with Jackson and his whole

story and could not let him go. He is loving life and has even become the mascot for the Trucking Dog Program. In fact, since Jackson's amazing tale occurred, the Beaumont Animal Services Division and Susanne Spirit have teamed up for a second doggie rescue/transport. On May 1, Delilah, a beautiful female pit bull terrier Susanne spotted on our Petfinder page, traveled cross country to California with other good-hearted trucker friends of Susanne's and was adopted there.

This heartwarming story is one of the many examples of why I do my job in animal control. It feels so good when we can save even just one life. It's also a testament to the value of microchipping—and the benefits of scanning strays more than once! At the end of the day I can rest with a smile on my face, knowing that we helped this wonderful animal find a loving home with the most wonderful of people. 



Jackson gets a farewell hug from Matthew Fortenberry.

## Helping You Help Feral Cats



**Alley Cat Allies' Trapping Kit** includes every material you'll need to perform and teach others about Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR). It includes *How to Help Feral Cats: A Step-by-Step Guide to Trap-Neuter-Return*, a DVD which includes *Trapping Cats: How to Trap an Entire Colony*, 50 leaflets to help you explain the basics of TNR and 25 *We're Helping Outdoor Cats* doorhangers to announce your next neighborhood trapping—all for just \$15.

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# Tattoo You

**Community rolls up its sleeves (literally) to show support for local shelter**

**Pets have a way of working** themselves into your heart.

A shelter fundraiser last summer showed that some animal lovers are just as eager to let them get onto their skin.

Last June, Freaks & Geeks Tattoo Sideshow in West Asheville, N.C., hosted a 12-hour tattoo and body-piercing marathon to benefit the Asheville Humane Society. Participants could choose among four paw-print tattoo designs for \$40, half off the \$80 that the shop normally charges. The shop's staff of three artists, including business partners Tiffany LeMeaux and Galen Holland, donated their time and supplies.

Daron James, owner of Diamond Thieves Body Piercing, volunteered his time to provide above-the-neck and belly button piercings during the daylong event for a discounted \$15.

You might think such an unusual fundraiser would have a rather limited appeal, as it involves sticking needles into people's bodies and marking them permanently. Being tattooed or pierced requires a good bit of courage and commitment—but the fundraiser proved to be a major hit. "When we opened the doors at nine o'clock in the

morning, we already had a line of people down the sidewalk, waiting to get tattooed. [The event] didn't even last 12 hours, because we ran out of supplies. We definitely didn't expect such an amazing turnout," says LeMeaux.

The tattoo artists did 52 paw-print tattoos that day, and about 20 people paid to get piercings. The event brought in \$2,740.

Additionally, for the entire month of June, Freaks & Geeks Tattoo Sideshow offered a \$10 coupon toward a tattoo for anyone who dropped off supplies for the shelter. "So we had an entire corner of our shop sort of dedicated to cat litter, food, pillows, bleach, and that kind of thing. I'm sure there was at least \$300 of supplies," LeMeaux says.

Katherine McGowan, the shelter's interim CEO/president, is grateful that LeMeaux and Holland organized the event to help homeless pets, and that the tattoo artists and piercer were willing to offer their services. "We were so pleased that they chose us. It was just a great, fun experience for us, and we realize it is a little different than the typical fundraiser that you see out there," she says.

This isn't the first time the business has raised money for an organization or cause. Last year, the studio put together a similar event to help fund breast cancer research, offering discounted prices on tattoos of pink ribbons, the symbol of support for breast cancer awareness.

It was an easy decision to have a tattoo marathon to benefit the shelter this year. LeMeaux was previously a veterinary technician for 12 years, working at clinics in Amelia Island, St. Augustine, and Jacksonville, Fla. She's been a vegetarian for more than 20 years, and describes herself as a lifelong animal advocate.

And several of the people who work at the shelter are her customers, too. "I definitely tattoo a lot of the staff there," she says, laughing.

One thing surprised both LeMeaux and McGowan. Many of those who lined up for tattoos were women in their 40s and 50s

## MOUTHPIECES ))))



Just add your organization's contact information and branding, and hang the materials up in your lobby or hand them out at your front desk, as appropriate. You don't even need to tear out the page: Go to [animalsheltering.org/mouthpieces](http://animalsheltering.org/mouthpieces) to download and print a clean PDF copy.

Send suggestions for future Mouthpieces to [asm@humanesociety.org](mailto:asm@humanesociety.org).

who were going under the needle for the first time. Their reasons varied. Some told McGowan that they were animal lovers, and they loved the paw-print design. Others said they believed it was for a good cause or they wanted a tattoo to memorialize a pet who had died.

One of the four designs that LeMeaux and Holland created was a paw print with a banner curling across it, and some customers who chose that design asked the artists to tattoo a pet's name inside it, which they did—free of charge.

"One gentleman I tattooed, he just wanted the word 'adopt' inside, which I thought was really cool. It was his first tattoo, as well," LeMeaux says.

Not only did the event raise thousands of dollars and supplies for the shelter, but it created lots of community goodwill for the studio. It's also likely made it a less intimidating place for those who might be mulling the merits of getting some skin art.

"I think it definitely takes away some of the stigma that tattoo artists tend to have—it makes us a little less frightening," she says. "These 50-plus-year-old women that have never stepped foot in a tattoo shop before felt completely comfortable coming in, and will probably come again." **AS**



Galen Holland and Tiffany LeMeaux, co-owners of Freaks & Geeks Tattoo Sideshow in West Asheville, N.C., cradle two kitties at the shelter—and show off a few tattoos of their own.

# Who's More Likely to Succeed?

*These two canine buddies have the same playfulness, the same heart, the same affectionate nature, the same love of a good tennis ball.*

**You know what they don't share?  
The same chance of a home.**

*At shelters and rescues around the country, **black dogs and cats are frequently the last to be adopted.***

*Most of us can't figure out why! Sometimes they don't show up as well in their adoption pictures, but these animals are just as friendly and loving as the rest of their kin.*

*There are so many great reasons to adopt a black animal:*

- *Black pets are slimming! Go for that jog with Fido and look like you've already lost five pounds.*
- *A little black cat never goes out of style. Whether you're trying to coordinate with your best outfit or your home, Midnight is sure to match—and her fur on your tuxedo won't even show up.*
- *Black dogs have that aura of mystery—even when they're licking your face.*
- *Adopt two or more black cats, and you can have your own miniature black panther party (ha ha).*

*Don't keep these inky dogs and cats in the dark. They're counting on you to see the beauty and lovability other people miss. Come in and say hi to one of our dark and charming animals—some good pats will be the highlight of their day!*



THE HUMANE SOCIETY  
OF THE UNITED STATES



**Free love.** Over one spring weekend, 41 animal welfare organizations in the San Francisco Bay area waived the adoption fees for 1,746 cats and dogs and got paid to do it. Maddie's

Fund sponsored the June 12-13 Matchmaker Adoptathon in Contra Costa and Alameda counties, awarding the groups \$500 for every animal adopted into a new home, for a total payout of \$873,000—almost twice as much as Maddie's had planned to spend. Dubbed a "financial stimulus package," the event was intended to mitigate the stress that the recession has placed on Bay area shelters and rescue groups. It wasn't just the cute and the cuddly flying out the doors, Maddie's Fund president Rich Avanzino told the *Contra Costa Times*; it was also the less-than-perfect animals, those with ailments or physical defects that made them harder to adopt. Oakland Animal Services led the pack,

placing 133 animals in new homes, while Paws and Tails Animal Rescue of Richmond, Calif., actually ran out of animals—the group adopted out all 45 of its available pets.

■ **There's a cat for that.** Your handheld may be able to find the closest Chinese restaurant or alert you to a great deal on duct tape, but can it lower your blood pressure or knead your aching muscles? No. For services like that, you need a cat. Playing off Apple's "There's an app for that" ad campaign for its iPhone, the ever-clever Oregon Humane Society in Portland ran its "There's A Cat for That" adoption campaign July 16-18 to get its user-friendly "overstock" into the hands of the public. Want an "energy-saving lap warmer"? Adopters could choose the LapPro application—a kitty who wanted plenty of affection. How about a "soothing sound machine"?

The PurrBox app (a cat inclined to purring) was ideal. Special discounts on fees resulted in the adoption of 53 kitten and 19 adult "apps" during the event. Cat owners want to know: Any chance of an app who'll scoop his own litter box?

■ **Mercury meltdown.** Say it's sunny and 83 degrees. That's not hot enough to fry an egg on the hood of a car, but certainly warm enough to bake a dog if he's left locked inside it. Without proper ventilation, the temperature inside can increase by an average of 40 degrees within one hour even on a mild day, according to a study by the Stanford University School of Medicine. To make the point crystal clear, the Humane Society of Sonoma County in Santa Rosa, Calif., parked a car outside the shelter with a PAW (PETemperature Automobile Weather) Gauge on its front seat.

The device provided real-time interior temperature readings that were accessible online 24 hours a day. On June 29, the device's first day of operation, as the outside air temperature read 83, the temperature in the car rocketed to 109, even with all the windows cracked and a sun reflector across the windshield, reported the *Sonoma West Times and News*. The shelter's executive director, Kiska Icard, was inspired to set up the PAW Gauge after she witnessed a dog at an animal hospital receiving emergency treatment for heatstroke after being left in a car.

■ **An Ultrasound Approach.** Last December, the Washington Animal Rescue League in Washington, D.C., sent out invitations—designed by Alexandria, Va., direct marketing firm Griswold and Griswold—to attend a \$1,000-per-person dinner to raise funds for a much-needed ultrasound machine for the league's medical center. It might be risky to ask for so much money during these tough economic times, but Robert Blizard, the shelter's development director, thought it was worth a try. The invitation included the story of a tumor-stricken Yorkshire terrier rescued from a puppy mill who would have



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benefitted from ultrasound. Within days of the package's mailing, Blizzard received a call from a woman who wanted to donate the entire cost of the \$33,000 machine. "I thought that someone was playing a joke on me, that it was a prank phone call," says Blizzard. But the offer was indeed real. The event ultimately raised more than twice the original amount, covering the cost of the ultrasound, training personnel, and other medical center expenses. The package and the stunning results garnered the League and the marketing firm a gold MAXI (Marketing Award for Excellence & Innovation) from the Direct Marketing Association of Washington, which honors outstanding fundraising creativity and outcomes.

HUMANE SOCIETY/SILICON VALLEY



**O Solar Mio.** If there's one thing California has plenty of, it's sunshine. The Humane Society of Silicon Valley in Milpitas decided to take advantage of nature's bounty by installing a state-of-the-art solar energy system in its 48,000-square-foot shelter cum animal community center. Tioga Energy of San Mateo, Calif., installed the system, which features solar panels (atop the carports and roof) that produce 33 percent of the shelter's electricity, and a white "cool" roof that reduces power demand by reflecting heat away from the building. The system, which went live on July 14, is expected to save the organization \$50,000 a year on power expenses. The shelter doesn't actually own the system—which is a good thing, according to former director Chris Benninger, who retired in September after heading the organization for 17 years. "You have to intimately understand the system to make sure you know that it is operating at peak efficiency," she says. "We're in the animal business, and I can barely spell solar paneling, let alone understand how the darn thing works." Instead,

the installation belongs to a banking institution that leases it to Tioga; Tioga maintains it and sells the power to the humane society at a rate guaranteed for 25 years. The center itself, dedicated in March 2009, was designed with a number of construction techniques and water- and energy-saving features that have earned it a Gold Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certificate from the U.S Green Building Council.

■ **This little piggy.** The Florida Keys SPCA in Key West is used to getting calls about stray cats and dogs, but stray pigs? Never. Until this past February, when a resident reported seeing a small pig running through the mangroves bordering the busy highway that links the Keys with the mainland. It took three animal control officers to catch the terrified swine, who was later estimated to be about 6 months old. No one came forward to claim her, so the staff set out to socialize the youngster—dubbed Hope—and find her a suitable home. Food and belly rubs turned out to be the way to her heart (isn't it the way to everyone's?). Hope came running for her daily meals of pig chow and fresh vegetables, followed by gentle ear-scratching and tummy tickling. "You'd start rubbing, and you'd see her legs start to fold, little by little, then ... she'd kind of flop down on the ground," says Cathy Baier, the shelter's dog training coordinator and behavior consultant, who cared for Hope during her stay. "She'd lift her



legs up so you could get in all the right spots." Within weeks, the frightened porker turned into a glutton for love. Working with a network of pig rescue groups, Baier located a couple near Gainesville, Fla., who were looking for a companion for their neutered male pig; after the pig was spayed and given a clean bill of health, a relay of drivers delivered the lucky little piggy, now named Hannah, to her new home. 🐷

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## 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?

*That was the question we asked for this issue's Coffee Break, and you responded by describing some of the great ways that you've spruced up your shelters to make them more cheerful and inviting to potential adopters.*



We are very fortunate to have a professional artist as a volunteer! She turned our cageless adult cat room into a colorful garden by painting a flower garden all around the room in bright, vivid colors—even added birds and butterflies! Everyone comments on how cheerful and fun it is. The cats just love it, and of course they tried to help with the project! They'd take off with the paint brushes, thinking they had found a new toy! The artist thought she would never get it finished.

—Marilyn Spivey, volunteer coordinator  
Friends for Animals Adoption Shelter  
Granbury, Texas

1) We utilize the posters from our auction each year to change up the messaging on our walls and to keep it fresh. 2) Flower boxes are refreshed regularly at our entry. 3) Our dogs and cats have colorful bedding in their kennels. We may be poor, but we are always clean and well organized.

—Terri Inglis, executive director  
Homeward Pet Adoption Center  
Woodinville, Washington

We believe the best way to make our facility appealing is to keep it clean and to greet each and every visitor, caller, etc. with a smiling face and a “Can I help you?” attitude. We pride ourselves on the fact that visitors often ask if we have animals because they can't smell any due to our commitment to cleanliness.

—Jean Meyer, animal caretaker/  
adoption counselor  
Keokuk Animal Services  
Keokuk, Iowa

Our front lobby is a nice, soothing, green color with lots of pictures of happy, adopted dogs and cats on the wall for folks to see. Our cats live cage-free in a room, and our dogs all have 5-by-10 runs and get to have a canine buddy when appropriate. Potential adopters like to see the dogs with others for companionship. We have made the best of our giant warehouse building, which used to be an antique barn but now is the only no-kill shelter in our city!

—Denise Bitz, executive director  
Brother Wolf Animal Rescue  
Asheville, North Carolina

Our cat room is bathed in sunlight, as we have floor-to-ceiling windows in our Cat Gazebo and skylights all around. Our dog-walking trails have comfy park benches for rest stops, flowering shrubs, and poop bag/waste stations for convenience!

—Jennifer Smieja, development coordinator  
HAWS—Humane Animal Welfare Society of  
Waukesha County  
Waukesha, Wisconsin

Our Cat Cottage is set up with three free-roaming cat rooms and one kitten room where they are kept in separate Tokyo cages. Each room has various amusing cat characters painted on the walls. We have cats playing in a rock 'n' roll band, looking out windows, and dressed up in togas holding olive branches. This keeps the room bright and encourages positive feelings. We also have small kitty porches that are screened in with wire mesh that the cats can go out and lounge in to get some sun. The "porches" are small, high off the ground, and are focused around one window per room. People love seeing a cat come out to greet them as they walk up to the main building!

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

Our walls throughout the shelter have been a soft, bluish-grey for years. A soothing color, but also boring. A number of months ago, staff started hanging various kinds of pictures to try to liven up the place. Then one of our board members (an artist) suggested a bright, kiwi green for the lobby. It worked! It fills the area with energy, which is just what we needed! And it looks terrific as a backdrop color for our wall of Lupine collars and leashes. Kiwi green rocks!

—Diane Lanier, board president  
Humane Society of Central Illinois  
Normal, Illinois

Our lobby is now a bright, welcoming, and inviting area. We have fish tanks, pictures, chairs, plants, and a bulletin board that we change with the seasons.

—Lorry Harbaugh, secretary/caretaker  
Bloomfield Township Animal Shelter  
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

We are a small shelter by big-city standards, but we recently added an addition that almost doubled our size. We put the kitten room in a section of the reception area with a big window for viewing them doing all of their kitten antics. We also put in large viewing windows for the cat rooms, which have small kitty steps up the walls and "cat walks" around the ceiling perimeter. The cats love it, and people enjoy watching them.

—Fay Jamison, board member  
Humane Society of Harrison County  
Shinnston, West Virginia

We make our shelter more appealing by brewing flavored coffee in the reception area where people enter. The aroma of flavored coffee is their first impression. People tell us that rather than smelling like a shelter that it smells like a gourmet coffee shop.

—Betty Flemming, treasurer/shelter manager  
Heart of Jackson Humane Society  
Holton, Kansas

With a memorial gift from a daughter of one of our faithful dog walkers, we are working on a Memorial Dog Park where people can sit with a dog they are thinking of adopting or introduce their own dog or dogs to a possible adoptable dog. The park will be in memory of Lloyd Williamson—the dog walker who passed away—and for all those who visit the shelter and need a place to perhaps grieve for a pet they've lost or to spend time brushing a resident dog or talking with them or simply letting them know they are loved. Our small no-kill shelter is very special—we think one of best in the country.

—Kelly Brook, director on the board  
Lincoln County Animal Shelter  
Newcastle, Maine

We display artwork in our courtyard and also have placed cement shortcut paths that lead to an outside sitting area. Our shelter also has outside play areas.

—Vincent Medley, assistant director  
San Antonio Animal Care Services  
San Antonio, Texas

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

Check out the latest Coffee Break question and submit your responses (150 words or less) at [animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak](http://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](http://animalsheltering.org) for contest rules, or send an e-mail or letter to the above addresses to request a printed copy.

# Rescued from Squalor

A house full of dogs provides a glimpse into the delusional world of animal hoarders

BY CARRIE ALLAN



The blue lights of a sheriff's black cruiser blaze through the early spring drizzle, flashing a signal of caution to any cars approaching the modest, ranch-style house on this rural road in Preston, Miss.

Such passersby are infrequent; the road is isolated, the piney woods around it stretching into the distance. But if you were to be driving by this morning, you would see a small woman—middle-aged, blond, perhaps once pretty—standing in the driveway between two officers from the sheriff's department. She is crying, pleading with them. Her face is crumpled and exhausted. The officers have their hands on her arms, restraining her.



ALL PHOTOS: KATHY MILAN/THE HSUS



Mange had caused many dogs to lose their fur; some had scratched and bitten themselves raw in their attempts to stop the itching. Eye infections were common.

Like a river moving around a boulder in its path, a half dozen grim-faced emergency responders in dark blue rain jackets and rubber boots divide and trudge past the officers, heading toward the woman's house.

If you saw this from the road, from a distance, what would you feel? Confusion? Pity for the woman, who is crying as though her heart might break?

Look again: Several loose dogs circle around the front yard, wandering onto the road. More dogs move slowly about in pens in the side yard, some peering out from ramshackle hutches of plywood. The only sounds are the rain, the low voices of the officers, and barking—some close by, other howls fainter, farther away, from the woods behind the house.

Many of the dogs don't look quite ... right. From a distance, it's hard to say why.

Come closer. Get out of your car. Wear shoes you don't care about; every few steps, there are piles of dog feces. There is also trash everywhere, and shoddy fencing made of plywood and rusted metal wiring, and a busted-up sofa in the driveway that has been mauled and shredded by the dogs. Chunks of its yellow, weather-stained foam litter the yard.

The sheriff has opened the plywood gate to allow the responders deeper into the property. As they pass the officers and the woman they're restraining, she says to them in a low, choked voice, "Please, go away."

But the responders here today—from The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), United Animal Nations, and the Mississippi Animal Rescue League—have a job to do, and that job requires balancing their pity for this woman with pity for the animals she's been keeping. Up close, their need is clear: There are more dogs in a front pen, thin, mangy dogs slinking around nervously, many with eye infections, some with open wounds, many with limbs that look bloody and scabbed—a sign that their skin has become so itchy from mange that they're chewing on themselves to try to make it stop.

Their discomfort is hard to witness, but there are signs of even more dismal fates. In the backyard, where more dogs are penned, a strange fragment catches the eye; its flash of white stands out against the brown of everything else. It's partially embedded in a pile of feces, but on second glance it's not hard to identify: It's part of a dog's jawbone, the teeth gleaming up from the mud.



The HSUS responders who helped in Mississippi had come directly from Tennessee, where they had assisted the Grainger County Humane Society in removing 120 cats from a dilapidated home.

From one of the pens, another small pack of nervous dogs watches the goings-on. The water in their kiddie pools, seemingly intended to serve as drinking stations, is dark green and slimy. But the most unsettling thing in this pen is a dead dog, its body wet with rain. It's obviously been dead for some time. Something—the other dogs? the rats running freely around the property?—has eaten most of its back legs and face away. Its fleshless muzzle is agape, the sockets of the eyes empty.

Some of the responders are putting on respirators now, preparing to enter the house.

### Good Intentions Gone Wrong?

Sheriff James Moore has been monitoring the situation here for several years. But until this spring morning when he served the warrant, even he hadn't been inside the house.

A new sheriff for Kemper County, Moore met the homeowner for the first time while campaigning in 2008. "She expressed a lot of concern about what kind of sheriff I would be in terms of protecting the dogs," he says. For several years, she has been running a rescue group out of

this property. Her group even had nonprofit tax status and a profile on Petfinder.com.

But after Moore began receiving complaints about the conditions of the property and the animals, he made it a point to speak with the homeowner more frequently and realized how misleading their first interaction had been. "The best thing that could have happened to those dogs was being taken away from her," he says.

The woman would also pay visits to the sheriff—ironically, to complain about her neighbors—that served as a pungent, visceral clue to Moore and his officers that something was seriously wrong. "Her smell would be in the office for days, and anything she brought or mailed to our office smelled like the house, too," he says.

Moore is the first person into the house this morning, securing the site and ensuring it's reasonably safe for animal handlers to enter. But even years of seeing—and smelling—what it was like on the outside did not adequately prepare him. "When I opened the door and saw what I saw, I could not believe it," he says.

The outside of the house is bad enough, with the poop and the trash and the mud, but at least the yard gets the

benefit of sunlight and occasional rain to wash away some of the nastiness.

Indoors, though, the droppings have stayed where they fell—the primary reason for the rescuers' respirators. The devices don't protect their eyes, though, which water upon exposure to the gases emanating from years of built-up feces. Their feet squish into what should be solid flooring but is instead covered in several inches of trash: nutritional supplements and soda cans and bags of dog food and potato chips and white bread—all of it mixed with poop.

Everything is covered in a layer of brownish grease, and there are dogs everywhere: little dogs in crates, a mama dog nursing puppies, other puppies blinking listlessly under reddish warming lights, hairless adult dogs roaming freely around the house, stopping now and then to scratch themselves furiously or lick open wounds. At least eight dogs of varying breeds are in the master bedroom, scrabbling underneath the bed and peeking out at the rescue teams. A mostly hairless dog hides in the bathtub, another one cowers behind the toilet near an overturned canister of Comet, and several puppies curl up be-

### Coping with Hoarders: Tips for Animal Welfare Groups

#### How to take on a collector without breaking your budget—or your staff

Animal hoarding situations exist in communities across the country, and they cause untold amounts of suffering for the animals involved. The more severe cases can be a threat to human health, both for those living nearby, and the hoarder herself, who may be incapable of recognizing the filthy conditions she's living in as a risk to her own well-being. When shelters intervene, they do a tremendous service for the animal and human victims of this complex phenomenon.

But a large hoarding case can create problems for shelters as well, says Joyce Garrity, executive director of the Dutchess County SPCA in Hyde Park, N.Y. "Animal hoarding—if the shelter doesn't prepare adequately in advance and become proactive—can really put a shelter in jeopardy, both with a huge space crunch and financially," she says. Planning ahead and being proactive, so that your staff is prepared for the short- and long-term implications of taking on a hoarder, is absolutely essential.

The Dutchess County SPCA has successfully handled multiple hoarding cases over the past decade. The roots of the organization's success lie in years of preparation and education—both internal and external. "A lot of organizations that do well with their hoarding cases and other abuse cases are big organizations, but we're small," says Garrity. "We really represent the majority, and so I feel if we can do

it, hopefully we can inspire others to know that they can do the same."

Garrity took her desire to inspire on the road this year, when she and Jami Landry, the shelter's senior humane law enforcement officer, co-presented an excellent workshop on handling hoarding at The HSUS's Animal Care Expo in Nashville, Tenn. Here are some of their recommendations for how shelters can prepare to take on the challenge of a major hoarding case.

**Don't be a meanie.** Hoarding situations often start small and gradually grow into major animal disaster areas. And it's when they're in the not-that-bad stage—when officers have seen evidence that more animals are arriving, and can tell the owner is beginning to struggle—that's the time to start intervening. But that's often a time when the conditions aren't dire enough to merit legal intervention, so it's vital to approach the owner in the spirit of sympathy and helpfulness.

"Many of the people who went into this went into it with a good heart, so our approach is never one of storm trooping in and acting aggressively," says Garrity. "We build up relationships because we want to be allowed onto their property, we want to be able to offer them assistance. In many of these cases it's a matter of reaching out to them and offering them opportunities to cut down on the population and to be responsible

... offering them spay/neuter opportunities, opportunities to voluntarily surrender animals. Building a relationship with the hoarder is important, treating these people with respect rather than as public enemy number one. They always say you catch more flies with honey, and it's really true."

#### **Be prepared to take legal action.**

Treating people with respect, and understanding that hoarding is usually caused by mental illness, is key to an effective approach. But when the approach doesn't work and the problem is clearly causing animal suffering, you need to be ready to use the law to get results.

"If we encounter a situation where it does fit our animal cruelty laws and we are able to charge them with a crime, we always do it," says Landry, "because even though the person isn't necessarily doing this intentionally to harm the animals, that's the only way we're going to be able to get them help that's going to benefit both themselves and the animals in their care."

Jail time is not what the Dutchess County SPCA typically wants for the hoarders it takes on. In fact, under an informed district attorney, an effective prosecution can ensure that the hoarder will stay out of jail—under the condition that they reduce the number of animals in their possession and seek counseling. "I know a lot of people are hesitant to charge them because they

neath the sink. Above them on the countertop, folded into a stack of dirty laundry, is a tiny, filthy, dead puppy.

### All Too Common

While this case seems extreme, it's not atypical. And it's the second time in less than a week that HSUS responders have been called to assist in a hoarding case. By the time they reach Mississippi, they've already been on the road for days, driving here directly from Tennessee, where they helped remove 120 cats from a home in similar conditions.

According to the authors of the recent book *Stuff: Compulsive Hoarding and the Meaning of Things*, authorities identify between 700 and 2,000 new cases of animal hoarding nationwide each year. "Because only the most severe cases get reported," write Smith College psychology professor Randy Frost and Boston University School of Social Work dean and professor Gail Steketee, "this is undoubtedly an underestimate."

Frost and Steketee describe the phenomenon as a severe version of a more general object-hoarding mentality. From their research, they've found most animal hoarders

feel like they're punishing someone who isn't intentionally harming the animals, but it's really better for them as well," Landry says.

**Educate key players well in advance.** Did you notice that adjective in front of "district attorney" in the previous tip? *Informed*. A small word that can make all the difference in how your cases get treated by law enforcement, prosecutors, and the media. And it's up to you to make sure that education happens.

When Garrity started as executive director of her shelter a decade ago, she immediately started building relationships with the local sheriff's department, and by listening to and talking with the officers there, she has created an invaluable supporter. "They don't have any extra officers to spare to go out on the road to investigate animal cruelty, and certainly animal hoarding complaints," she says. "So they are more than happy to have our officers assist them and to help us in any way." If your relationship with local law enforcement and district attorneys isn't what it could be, set up a meeting and open a dialogue—then make sure to demonstrate that your humane officers and your organization are worthy of that relationship and of their trust, Garrity advises.

That goes for developing relationships with the local media as well. Informing the community about what

you do should ideally begin long before you go through trial by fire during a major seizure. If you've developed a reputation as a trustworthy group, if people understand your role in the community, you won't have to work as hard to explain your intentions and needs during a major cruelty case.

**Know who your friends are.** If you suddenly have to take in dozens of sickly animals, what will you do? Will you have the space? The staff? The sanity?

All three can get a boost if you have relationships in place before you have to bring in the animals. If you develop good relationships with other shelters, with rescue and foster groups, and with community-minded veterinarians, you'll find that you already have a strong support network in crisis situations and can take advantage of resource sharing.

"It's important to cultivate that group ahead of time, so that you're not running on emotion when it happens," says Garrity. If you have to punt at 11 p.m. on the day of the seizure, or try to find partners after you've been up all night removing 70 fractious cats from a falling-down home, the agreements aren't going to be as strong, and it will be harder to ensure that your bases are covered. In those cases, Garrity says, "you tend to make agreements with people out of—I'm trying to think of a word other than

'desperation,' but desperation really is the word."

**Remember that other agencies can play a role.** Sometimes the health department or code enforcement can be your best friend when you're dealing with an uncooperative hoarder. Some hoarding situations can threaten the stability of a building, or can result in such a buildup of feces and an infestation of pests that they're a threat to human health—of the resident, but also of neighbors. In some cases where prosecution for animal cruelty isn't viable, improvements can be made through other means.

Dutchess County SPCA works with adult protective services all the time, and with child protective services as well, says Landry. "There was at least one instance where we discovered mentally disabled children who were living in horrific conditions through a hoarding investigation," she says. "No one was aware that these children were even in the residence, but investigating hoarding often leads us to finding humans in jeopardy as well."

As with your collaboration with other animal welfare groups, it's smart to get these relationships in place before you need them. Hoarding is a complex issue, and it often takes an interagency approach to bring a case to a satisfactory close.



HSUS field responder Rowdy Shaw carries an armload of puppies away from the filthy home where they were found.

“are female, well over forty years old, and single, widowed, or divorced. Cats and dogs are the most frequent animals hoarded, and the numbers vary widely but average around forty, with a few cases of well over one hundred. In about 80 percent of cases, dead, dying, or diseased animals can be found on the premises.”

Many people who hoard inanimate objects collect things that others wouldn't see as particularly valuable: newspapers piled into stacks that fill rooms, CDs, books, canned goods, clothing, stuffed toys, small plastic containers—all of it justified by some need the hoarder cannot always articulate, but which has come to define his existence. Adam Parascandola, director of animal cruelty issues for The HSUS's Animal Cruelty and Fighting Campaign, recalls a case from a previous job when he seized neglected cats from a home so overwhelmed with junk that the property was condemned and the owner forced to move. When Parascandola returned to check the humane traps he had set to catch the cats hiding around the house, the owner was there, packing garbage into bags—not to throw away, but to carry to her new residence. “It was literally, like, trash,” he says. “We tried to tell her, ‘That’s trash; you don’t need to take that to your new place,’ but she just didn’t understand.”

Animal hoarders, on the other hand, don't just collect trash. They collect lives—often animals who need help, who've been abandoned or given up at shelters and need a caregiver. But hoarders have a blindness that keeps them from recognizing when their own need to collect crosses a line, when their resources can't provide for the number of pets they've taken in. In cases like the one in Preston, many hoarders also fail to spay or neuter the animals they have—leading to more breeding and ever-escalating pressure on scant space, time, and money.

The psychology of hoarding has often been linked to obsessive compulsive disorder, but more recent research indicates it's not clear where hoarding falls in a spectrum of possible pathologies.

“The trend over the past two decades has been to more readily label hoarding as a disease,” writes Northeastern University sociology professor Arnold Arluke in *Inside Animal Hoarding: The Case of Barbara Erickson and Her 552 Dogs*. But, he adds, “attempts to do so have been disappointing

because many hoarders do not fit so neatly into various diagnostic labels.” Hoarders' failure to recognize the filth of their surroundings or the suffering of their animals supports the theory that they are delusional. Their inability to stop harmful behavior mirrors the psychology of addiction. The traumatic or neglectful childhoods experienced by many hoarders push them to trust animals more than people—a way of thinking common to attachment disorders.

And while the typical image of an obsessive-compulsive hand-washer may seem hard to align with the squalor of hoarders' homes, many of those homes contain, among the chaos, signs of desperate attempts to maintain order. HSUS field responder Rowdy Shaw recalls one hoarder's home where “downstairs, there were thousands and thousands of Mountain Dew cans, but then upstairs, she had on the wall this nice, long wooden rack of all her cassette tapes, each still wrapped in the original plastic and all alphabetized,” he says. “It's very strange that you can live in urine and feces up to the wall outlets, and you can't even breathe in the house, but you find these signs” of attempted organization.

Some hoarders are regular multiple-pet owners who become overwhelmed due to unexpected changes—loss of a job, for example—while others are exploiters, whose psychological model runs closer to those we call sociopaths. But it's a third category—mission-driven animal hoarders—that makes up the majority of cases, write Frost and Steketee. Their behavior represents “an attempt to love that winds up destroying its target.”

These hoarders often feel they have a special connection to animals. The irony often seems like a perverse joke to the emergency responders and shelter staff called in to save animals from people who, even as dead cats and dogs are being carried from their homes, still maintain their belief that they alone know what's best for them.

### Sweet Surrender

The animals, apparently, feel differently. Almost as soon as the HSUS emergency response rig opens its doors, revealing rows of scrubbed-down stainless steel caging and heaving an antiseptic breath over the fetid landscape, one of the loose dogs on the property runs onto it, finds a towel of her liking, and curls up on it, ready to leave.

**Many people who hoard inanimate objects collect things that others wouldn't see as particularly valuable: newspapers piled into stacks that fill rooms, CDs, books, canned goods, clothing, stuffed toys, small plastic containers—all of it justified by some need the hoarder cannot always articulate, but which has come to define his existence.**

## animal hoarding



Some dogs in the Mississippi home had been breeding, exacerbating an already overcrowded situation with the addition of new puppies.



Rescued from the muck, this dog traveled north with field responder Karla Goodson and the rest of The HSUS team to receive medical treatment and rehabilitation from the Washington Animal Rescue League in the nation's capital. Many large-scale rescues would not be possible without the help of shelters that take in the animals, treat them, and place them with new families.

She has to wait a while. By the end of the seizure, the property's estimated 70 animals will turn out to total 181. Most of the dogs aren't aggressive, but they're unsocialized and nervous about being handled. Rounding up the ones in the pens—some of whom, despite their bad condition, can still run fast—takes kindness, skill, and time. Each animal has to be documented for court; this time-consuming process involves photographing the area where the animal was found, and then the animal himself from multiple angles in order to capture his physical condition.

By midafternoon, the steady rain has turned the grounds into a muddy poop soup, and the teams of responders are soaked and filthy. They have removed scores of dogs, and many more are still waiting.

To get to the dogs in the main pen in the front yard, the rescuers have to use wire cutters, a scene made more bizarre by the tiny audience watching them from inside the still-shuttered house: Dozens of rats are peering out the window and seem to be wondering if there might be a space for them on the rescue rig, too.

The animals' owner is no longer on the property. After refusing to calm down, she has been arrested for disorderly conduct and taken away. It's a minor infraction, and she'll be out of jail tomorrow. But later in the day, Parascandola goes to see her. He's hoping to get the thing that rescuers pray for in these cases: legal custody.

A major hoarding case takes tremendous resources—people to rescue the animals, veterinarians to evaluate and treat them, a place to hold them safely and humanely while the case progresses. Moore and Debra Boswell, executive director of the Mississippi Animal Rescue League, have worked for nearly nine months to plan this seizure, agreeing in the end that they'd need outside help.

It's difficult for any local agency to handle such a case on its own, says Parascandola. Many shelters are already overwhelmed, and the abrupt arrival of scores of animals can force them to euthanize healthy, adoptable pets in order to make space for sickly, skittish hoarding victims—a terrible choice, and one that sometimes prevents shelters from intervening in hoarding situations.

In many hoarding cases, shelters must hold animals for long periods as the owner fights the charges in court. If local laws don't require the owner or the state to cover costs, shelters may spend tens of thousands of dollars to house and feed the victims—a massive drain on already limited resources. But if owners agree to surrender the animals, they can be treated, evaluated for adoption, and placed into new homes quickly.

In the visiting area of the jail, Parascandola made his case. "She asked first if she surrendered the animals, would that prevent her from being prosecuted? And I said 'No, absolutely not.' And then she said, 'Well, then why should I surrender them?' And I said, 'For the dogs. They need to get out and into a better situation.'"

Whether it was due to Parascandola's plea—or simply because she couldn't afford to pay the bond required to cover the costs of holding the animals—the woman did everyone a favor: She surrendered all but three; later, a court ruled that even they should not be returned to her. That means that the 181 animals taken from the property can be distributed among shelters that have offered to help, and placed into new homes. It means that when scores of nervous, hairless, shivering dogs are driven away from the prop-

perts have estimated the recidivism rate for hoarding at close to 100 percent.

Talking to a hoarder, says Boswell, is almost like speaking another language. Their denial can be difficult to penetrate. "If you haven't dealt with them and aren't experienced, they can sound like they're making sense," she says.

Hoarders will often respond to a list of concerns with a list of excuses. In conversations with Parascandola and the sheriff, the Mississippi woman claimed that others had

## The very fact that hoarding is a psychological disorder makes prosecution all the more critical—because without it, the hoarder will almost certainly begin collecting animals again.

erty in the evening, they have seen the last of this place—a place where they came to be rescued, only to be neglected, starved, and allowed to get sick. It means the end of false hope, and the beginning of the real thing.

### The Prosecution Problem

For the animals, it's the start of a new life. But for the people who worked so hard to save them, it's not the end of the case. Despite copious evidence provided by the onsite team and by Moore's office, at press time—some six months after the seizure—the local prosecutor had not yet brought cruelty charges.

This outcome is far too frequent, often stemming from the pity that prosecutors and law enforcement feel for people who are sometimes portrayed—and who may present themselves—as confused but well-meaning motherly types who just loved animals too much.

Under criminal law, a perpetrator's intent is significant. Establishing intent to commit a crime typically involves proving someone knowingly took actions that would result in an illegal outcome.

In the case of hoarders, the issue of intent is muddy at best. A reasonable person can foresee the consequences of taking in animal after animal without an accompanying increase in resources. But most hoarders do not make this connection. And yet, as Arluke writes in *Inside Animal Hoarding*, the outcome "can be more disturbing than incidents of deliberate cruelty toward or torture of individual animals. Often, [hoarding] affects many animals kept for months or even years under conditions of horrendous deprivation and suffering."

It's a paradox at the heart of the hoarding phenomenon: The behavior is driven by sickness, and those who suffer from it deserve some sympathy. But the very fact that it is a psychological disorder makes prosecution all the more critical—because without it, the hoarder will almost certainly begin collecting animals again; some ex-

dumped dead dogs on her property, that some of her animals had been kidnapped and then brought back infected with mange. In her mind, none of the conditions seemed to be her responsibility. (According to one of Moore's officers, she even seemed to believe that the scores of rats running around her property were rabbits. "I've never seen rabbits with such long skinny tails," he says.)

Boswell wants to see charges brought. "It's not that we want to see her in jail," she says, "but that's the control." Prosecution is often the only way to ensure, via conditions of sentencing, that a hoarder will not regress. If a person's freedom is made conditional on not owning animals, that stipulation can sometimes effectively penetrate the layers of denial. It is often the only way to get hoarders to stop.

For Moore, who'd never dealt with a hoarding case before this one, the experience has been eye-opening. He wants the case prosecuted as much as anyone does. And he's already had a frightening glimpse into how thoroughly hoarders misunderstand how much their behavior hurts the animals they claim to love—and how important it is that they be held accountable, in spite of their illness.

Since the seizure, he says, he's already heard that the animals' owner has moved toward obtaining more pets. "Last thing I was aware of was that she was going to Petco in Meridian and trying to get some animals from them, and they told her they won't deal with her anymore," he says.

But that didn't stop her. Her blindness is so complete that she came to Moore himself—the man who's been hearing complaints for years, who's talked to her neighbors, who was the first to open the door of her house and see the filth and the clutter and the sick, mangy animals everywhere.

"She wanted me to write a letter saying she was not charged with any kind of cruelty charges, and so it's OK for her to receive animals again," he says. "I thought, 'She has to be kidding.'" 



Bill Mitchell, a veterinarian at Bristow Veterinary Hospital in Oklahoma, helps combat pet overpopulation by devoting part of each Thursday in his clinic to doing low-cost spay/neuter surgeries for low-income families.

# MAKING Spay/Neuter AN INSIDE JOB

## Low-cost clinics within clinics combat overpopulation

BY JAMES HETTINGER

Los Angeles has the glitz and glamour of Hollywood, Universal Studios, and the Lakers.

Oklahoma has oil wells, more man-made lakes than any other state, and Sooners football.

So maybe it's not a fair fight in the bling department.

But Laura Beth Heisen has identified something Oklahoma's got that Los Angeles needs: low-cost spay/neuter surgeries performed by local veterinarians in their clinics.

Heisen chaired the Los Angeles Spay/Neuter Advisory Committee, a panel the city council appointed after passing a law in 2008 that requires cats and dogs in the city to be spayed or neutered after the age of 4 months. The committee sought to figure out how to minimize the law's potential adverse impact on low-income people.

Some of her colleagues focused on getting the city animal services department to provide more spay/neuter, Heisen says, but that struck her as a futile approach.

"No matter what you do, the department does not have enough money to provide anywhere near the number of spays and neuters that need to be done in order to make a dent in the overpopulation," she says. "And there is no animal control jurisdiction in the universe that has enough money to do that. Yet, it needs to be done. We have a mandatory spay/neuter ordinance, and even if we didn't, just the

sheer magnitude of the overpopulation means that we need to be providing a lot more spay/neuters than we are."

Los Angeles has a pet overpopulation problem for the same reason that other regions do, Heisen says. It boils down to mathematics: There are too many unsterilized pets and not enough veterinarians offering affordable spay/neuter surgeries. Low-income Los Angeles residents want to get their pets fixed, she insists—pointing to the large turnout for a recent spay/neuter van program in South L.A.—but they simply can't afford it.

Heisen recalls thinking there must be a way to convince local vets that they could benefit by providing spay/neuter surgeries for low-income people and feral cats. But she says when she brought that topic up in her committee, she got "14 blank stares," and she had no answer, either.

While researching, Heisen stumbled upon a possible solution halfway across the country. The Oklahoma Spay Network had started the In-Clinic Clinics program, which recruits private veterinarians in rural southeastern Oklahoma to do high-volume, low-cost spay/neuter surgeries for low-income pet owners.

The model differs by community, but essentially works like this: Veterinary clinics agree to devote a portion of the week to doing low-cost spay/neuter surgeries for residents

## involving vets in spay/neuter

who meet income eligibility requirements. A local shelter or humane organization helps coordinate the appointments and, if needed, can provide support personnel for tasks such as check-in and walking animals to and from their cages.

The program allows families earning \$35,000 or less to get a dog spayed or neutered for \$45 and a cat for \$35—compared to regular-price surgeries in Oklahoma that generally run \$100 per dog and \$65-\$75 per cat, according to Ruth Steinberger, a coordinator for the network.

For Los Angeles, Heisen has rechristened the proposal the Neighborhood Neuter program because it involves local veterinarians serving their community. The idea stalled for about a year because L.A. Animal Services was searching for a new general manager, Heisen says, but she plans to push for it anew now that a new manager has taken office.

Heisen touts Neighborhood Neuter as a win all around. The community gets additional spay/neuter surgeries performed without the expense of building and equipping a separate spay/neuter clinic or operating a mobile unit. Veterinarians can turn a modest profit for working a relatively short time. The program is flexible enough that vets can run the low-cost clinic on a Sunday or schedule the low-cost surgeries to fill gaps in their regular surgery schedule during the week.

By enforcing the income restrictions, the program prevents the “cannibalism” of the low-cost clients eating into the veterinarian’s regular client base, Heisen says; the low-cost clinic serves “the people who couldn’t afford it otherwise” and would never become regular clients. Everyone gets good publicity for helping address pet overpopulation.

While many communities with subsidized spay/neuter programs don’t worry too much about ensuring their clients are truly low-income—believing that it’s more important for

the surgeries to get done, even if it means some occasional fudging by those who really could afford it—the Oklahoma program does due diligence on this front. Organizers ask clients to be prepared to show proof of income, such as a pay stub or tax statement, Steinberger explains. It’s important to make sure the applicants truly qualify, she adds, because veterinarians won’t participate if they believe they’re undercutting themselves by offering cut-rate services to people who could afford to pay regular prices. “If they feel like they’re shafting themselves, they’re not gonna keep the program going.”

And the program also provides an outlet for humane-minded volunteers who might not want to work in a shelter. “If you’ve got an active humane community, there will be some people with a higher level of skills who want to do this,” Heisen says. “There are so many people who want to make a dent in saving shelter animals, but don’t have the emotional strength to go inside a shelter.”

### It’s OK in Oklahoma

What Heisen wants for L.A. is already up and running in several Oklahoma towns.

Claremore, Okla., a city of around 32,000 north of Tulsa, passed an ordinance in 2009 requiring city residents to spay or neuter their pets or obtain a \$120 permit to keep the animals intact.

“When we passed the spay/neuter ordinance, we didn’t want to penalize anybody if they couldn’t afford it,” explains Jennifer Cummings, the city’s animal control supervisor. Officials mulled the idea of having Spay Oklahoma, a non-profit that runs a Tulsa-based low-cost clinic, bring its mobile unit to Claremore occasionally. The mobile clinic had visited Claremore before the ordinance passed and done about 100 surgeries in a day, Cummings recalls. But Brady Robbins, a veterinarian at the Ark Animal Hospital in Claremore who also works for Spay Oklahoma, offered to do low-cost spay/neuter surgeries once a week in his practice.

Cummings says the arrangement, which is unaffiliated with the Oklahoma Spay Network, is working well and has helped reduce the number of puppy and kitten litters arriving at the Claremore Animal Shelter. Clients sign up by bringing their payment and proof of income to the shelter. “We take care of all the paperwork, so it doesn’t inconvenience his clients or his staff,” she says. The program is more convenient for clients than having to schedule around the monthly visit of a mobile unit, she adds, and it doesn’t have the waiting list that they encounter at the clinic in Tulsa.

Robbins, who’s worked for Spay Oklahoma for about three years and done low-cost surgeries at his practice for more than a year, says he and his two technicians average about 40 surgeries on a low-income day, and have done as many as 58. Older, heavier dogs typically take 15 to 20 minutes, while smaller dogs get done in eight to 12 minutes, he estimates.



A dog awaits sterilization surgery at Bristow Veterinary Hospital in Oklahoma.

“High volume’s not for everybody. It really isn’t,” says Robbins. “I think that depends a little bit on who you are as a person, if you like that challenge.” Noting that he’s probably done 21,000 spay/neuter surgeries in the past three years between Spay Oklahoma and his clinic, Robbins says he’s gotten more efficient.

A key to success is a staff that works well together, including an anesthesia technician and someone with a strong back to move the animals on and off the surgery tables. The low-cost program “makes things a little more hectic for that day,” Robbins says, but solid organization can help handle the volume. His staff utilizes two tables and a system where they do surgery on one animal while the other is being anesthetized. The animals get a pre-anesthetic in their cages, then get sedated in a prep room before going into surgery.

It helps for the team members to remember they’re working toward the same goals—helping low-income people, reducing euthanasia, minimizing dog packs in rural areas, and cutting down on the number of pets dumped on the side of the road.

Asked if he worries about people fibbing about their income to take advantage of the program, Robbins says Cummings does a great job of screening people, and the vast majority of clients are honest and concerned about their pets. And even on those rare occasions when a client rolls up in a \$68,000 car, Robbins says he’s learned not to jump to conclusions: “I don’t judge people by what they look like, or what they’re wearing, or what they’re driving.”

Robbins says if you’re organized, you can break even or make a small profit by performing low-cost surgeries, though the income isn’t enough to sustain his entire practice.

The cost of a regular-price spay/neuter prevents some people from getting the surgery done, but Robbins says he’s also run into male clients whose attitude is, “You’re not neutering my dog. He’s got testicles for a reason!”

The low-cost clinic-within-a-clinic model “takes work on everybody’s part,” notes Steinberger, who’s also the director of outreach and education for Spay Oklahoma. “We have a lot of clients who have never been to a veterinarian before, so of course this is challenging. But we also know that we have more and more veterinarians who recognize that animals are suffering, and that they are deeply a part of the solution.”

Bill Mitchell of Bristow, Okla., is one of those veterinarians. He’s offered low-cost spay/neuter surgeries for several years through a variety of programs; he currently sets aside a half day on Thursdays for a project called Fix 5,000 at the Bristow Veterinary Hospital, located in a town between Tulsa and Oklahoma City.

Income screening is essential to make sure you’re not taking business away from other veterinarians, Mitchell says. He recalls that in past years, people would simply call a humane society and profess to have a certain income, then get scheduled for a low-cost appointment at his clinic. But he’d see people drive up in new cars with Great Danes, “and I’m

## Resources

For information on the “quick spay” techniques developed by veterinarian W. Marvin Mackie, which can help veterinarians perform a high volume of low-cost surgeries, visit [youtube.com/user/DoctorMackie](https://www.youtube.com/user/DoctorMackie).

For further resources on high-volume spay/neuter, check out the videos at the resources section of the Humane Alliance website at [humanealliance.org](http://humanealliance.org).

For information on The Humane Society of the United States’ Gulf Coast Spay/Neuter Campaign, including sample advertisements and research material, go to [animalsheltering.org/spayneutercampaign](http://animalsheltering.org/spayneutercampaign).

doing surgeries for \$35. I just felt like I was being taken advantage of.”

Mitchell says his current low-cost program works well in part because of the help provided by the Oklahoma Alliance for Animals, a coalition of animal welfare groups. The alliance has secured grant money for people who can’t afford the low-income rate, advertises the clinic through local radio stations and free publications, handles the paperwork and record-keeping, and pays for an outside phone line to schedule appointments. “It doesn’t work for me if I’m tying up my office staff, my receptionist, tying up the computer program keeping records,” he notes.

A high volume of surgeries helps make the program financially viable, Mitchell says, noting that he can do five or six surgeries per hour. “So if I can set up 10 surgeries and get it done in two hours, that works out to a decent income for that day.”

He initially feared that he might lose business or undercut himself, but he’s found that his low-cost clients are generally not the same people as his regular clients. “If you can build up the volume and make it where it’s efficient time-wise for you ... it’s not a big income loss. It can be an income that you wouldn’t expect during a slow period.”

Heisen believes the model can work in a big city or rural town, with or without a law requiring spay/neuter. “This program is great for mandatory spay/neuter areas, to help people comply with the law, but isn’t really the bottom line getting enough spay/neuters to reduce the overpopulation? And looked at in that way, this program is needed everywhere.” 

## Rehab Project

The hard work of turning puppy mill dogs into pets yields extraordinary rewards for shelters and adopters

BY JIM BAKER



MICHELLE RILEY/THE HSUS

Puppy mill dogs often come from inhumane environments where they are deprived of any positive interactions with humans. Many need some time, treats, and affection to begin thinking of people as friends.

**The official on the phone explains** the situation: A raid on a puppy mill in your area is imminent, and she expects a seizure of a large number of dogs, most likely in poor condition. Can your shelter take them in? Provide long-term housing while custody issues are resolved? Rehabilitate these fearful, hurting creatures, and get them ready for adoption?

If you're Suzy Swims, you say "yes."

Swims, director of operations at the Norfolk SPCA in Virginia, has taken calls like this at least half a dozen times, so she knows exactly what to do when they come in. Her shelter immediately swings into what she calls "puppy mill mode." Before a single dog arrives, staff and volunteers set up kennels

with clean bedding, bowls of fresh food and water, and stuffed animals. They put together an intake station, where each animal will be documented and receive a name band. They establish vaccination and bathing stations, too. The morning after the dogs hit the shelter, the staff comes in a few hours early to take them all out for their first potty break, playtime, and breath of fresh air. It's the beginning of the dogs' first steps toward health and socialization. They're starting a journey that the shelter staff hopes will result in their eventual adoption.

It's an impressive system, and these days, all the pieces of the shelter's response usually tick like clockwork. But Swims is quick to

admit that this process wasn't always a model of efficiency, especially when the staff and volunteers were new to the drill. "Our first [puppy mill intake] was ... not that great," she says, chuckling at the memory.

That's no surprise: taking in puppy mill dogs, treating them, housing them, rehabilitating them, and finding them homes is a complicated, stressful process, and a learning curve should be expected. Most shelters' plans for such a challenge are works in progress, and they're always striving to improve their performance, listen to feedback, and find better approaches.

Some shelters around the country have worked on major puppy mill seizures so many

times that they have created reliable, ready-to-go systems. From intake through adoption, they've found strategies and techniques that work, helping them turn skittish, unsocialized dogs into companion animals that people will want to take home.

## Let's Get Physical

If faced with the prospect of caring for scores of stinky, squirming, frightened puppy mill dogs, what do you do? Where do you even *begin*?

Some shelters would understandably freak out. But not the staff and volunteers of the Humane Society of Missouri, who have many years of experience handling these situations. Missouri is often considered the epicenter of the puppy mill trade in the United States. Approximately 40 percent of all pet store puppies are bred in the state, where almost 200,000 breeding dogs produce up to a million puppies a year.

Those numbers have made the staff of the Humane Society of Missouri real pros at handling the needs of seized puppy mill dogs. "We've been doing this for so long that we really do have a set list of procedures that we follow, so it's actually—I don't want to say 'routine'—but it is fairly organized," says Linda Campbell, a certified professional dog trainer (CPDT) and a 30-year veteran of the shelter, where she's the director of programs.

Team members often assist on-site at the bust, pick up the animals included in a warrant issued by local authorities, and transport them back to the shelter. A triage team is set up and waiting for them, with veterinarians, technicians, and shelter workers. Each dog is photographed, tagged, and gets a complete initial physical, so any health issues can be identified. The shelter waits to deal with behavior issues, says Campbell; the top priority is to give the dogs relief from suffering caused by longstanding neglect. That often means bathing and grooming them, washing away months or even years of accumulated filth, which goes a long way toward helping the dogs feel much better. Staff treats their medical problems, easing the pain of mange or skin infections, and they provide treatment for flea and tick infestation. The more com-



One of the first steps during the intake of puppy mill dogs is a physical examination of each dog, with veterinarians and staff checking for medical conditions that need immediate care. This pup was one of more than 200 dogs rescued in a 2009 HSUS raid on a puppy mill in New Albany, Ind.

fortable the dogs can be made to feel, the more likely they are to relax, shelter staff say.

It's important to try to keep the dogs calm—or as calm as they can be. "We try not to stress them too much in the beginning. They've been through enough, and you have to give them time," says Connie Brooks, director of operations at SPCA Tampa Bay in Largo, Fla. "Some of them have never seen people, except for their caretaker that feeds them. There are a lot of them who ... never have the emotional attachment to humans. They don't understand it."

## Room at the Inn

Once the intake process is complete, shelters have to consider the next hurdle: housing. Not only do they have to find room for the puppy mill dogs, but they have to do it in a way that protects them (and the rest of the shelter population) and best promotes their rehabilitation.

The staff at the SPCA of Texas starts thinking about housing issues before the seized dogs enter the Dallas shelter. The goal is to reduce the animals' stress as they're taken from a familiar—if horrible—environment into one that's entirely new. Having a record of where the dogs were, and who they were with, at the site of the seizure helps the shelter provide some familiar company, says Ann Barnes, senior vice president of operations. "When we bring them back here, we try to re-create that same setup, as far as who's kenneled together and who are neighbors. The stress of packing them up and moving them [to the shelter] is enough already."

Puppy mill dogs are given medical and behavior evaluations, and then the staff starts to separate them according to a color-coded system: green, yellow, and red. Green applies to dogs who have retained some social skills and aren't overly fearful. Yellow indicates those whose behavior is located somewhere in the



NORFOLK SPCA

It's always a joyful moment when the shelter staff gets to take puppy mill dogs for their first experience of outdoor playtime. It's also a great opportunity to socialize them, as Kari Vincent, community outreach and volunteer manager at the Norfolk SPCA, demonstrates.

middle of the spectrum. And red dogs? They'll need a lot of work. Dogs who have been assigned the same color, and who were housed together at the puppy mill, stay together. The entire group of seized dogs is housed in a temporary, movable kenneling system under a tent outside the shelter, away from the rest of the population. "We find that if we move the reds away from the yellows, the yellows kind of turn around on their own. The reds are kind of like the troublemakers," Barnes says. "We'll move them to the far end, and they'll get the most attention from the volunteers."

Dogs in the green group are often ready for adoption soon after they arrive.

The Oregon Humane Society typically has four "pods" of dogs available for adoption, and when the shelter takes in puppy mill dogs, the staff closes down one of those pods to house them. (This pod is off-limits to the public; the staff also puts paper over the windows. This spares the dogs—who came from an environment where they rarely saw humans—from the stress of having people watching them every day.) The dogs are groomed and then spayed and

neutered. Volunteers who have more advanced skills working with shy dogs clean their kennels, and talk calmly to them, providing consistency throughout their stay.

While nervous about people, most of the dogs are used to being around other dogs. "That's a plus, because you can typically house them together in groups," says Tanya Roberts, CPDT, manager of the shelter's training and behavior department. Puppy mill dogs can often be paired up and housed together, because they're used to the company of canines. This is typically a



Once news hits that puppy mill dogs are available for adoption, the response is often tremendous. In this instance, the Norfolk SPCA received 200 applications for about 30 puppy mill dogs.

bleeding for shelters that are hard-pressed for space.

The shelter's staff also tries to match dogs, placing the most skittish ones with those who are dog-friendly and a little more confident. "I think it helps, because we know dogs learn from watching and seeing other animals do things. So from a potty-training perspective, that's really good," Roberts says.

### Work with Me

Once the housing issues have been sorted out, staff and volunteers can focus their attention on socialization—a task that requires patience and typically moves forward in a series of baby steps. Shelter trainers and behaviorists describe this process as one of establishing a routine, so the dogs know what to expect; working with them day by day; and slowly moving the dogs—sometimes inch by inch—out of their comfort zones. Rushing these dogs to accept handling and other novel experiences can actually derail their progress, trainers say. It usually takes time before they'll approach people, soliciting and accepting human attention.

Puppy mill dogs often exhibit behaviors that come from living all their lives in filthy conditions, without enrichment, and in close quarters with many other dogs. Because they never had the opportunity to relieve themselves away from where they eat and sleep, they're used to living in their own waste and are rarely housetrained. Because they had to compete against other dogs for food, they often display food aggression. And, of course, their interactions with humans have usually been severely limited, and often negative.

The Oregon Humane Society uses Dog Appeasing Pheromone (DAP), a synthetic pheromone that's designed to reduce fear and stress-related behavior in puppies and adult dogs, to help puppy mill dogs begin to learn appropriate potty habits. The staff sprays the product, which also comes in an electric diffuser, on the dogs' bedding. "We've found that DAP helps dogs target their beds to sleep in and not to poop on, which is a problem with a lot of these puppy mill dogs," says Roberts. At first, she says, "You put a blanket down, they go over and pee and poo on it. We go, 'No, that's your bed, keep your bed clean!'" DAP helps the



Veterinary staff of the Norfolk SPCA delivered these puppies by cesarian from a shih tzu named Jocelyn who was taken in from a puppy mill raid. All of the puppies went right into foster care with their mother, and they were officially adopted once they reached 8 weeks of age.

dogs see their blankets as a place to relax and sleep.

The SPCA of Texas has found a way to help puppy mill dogs who exhibit food aggression. "We free-feed them. They have to understand that while they're with us, they won't ever be without food," Barnes says.

The staff puts out big, rubber livestock bowls—the kind used to feed grain to horses. "That's what we put in with each single dog, so they have an unlimited supply of food in front of them, even if it's a Chihuahua. It will always be there, so they won't have to gorge themselves. A majority of the time, they turn themselves around, and we don't have any more issues."

Of course, the crucial part of socialization is helping puppy mill dogs to become comfortable and bonded with people, so that they can be adopted. They'll also have to get used to scary things like big, open spaces and walking on a leash. "The main challenge is just fear itself. They're fine with dogs, because most of them have lived with many dogs. It's the fear of being with humans," Brooks says. "It's the ones that have been in [puppy mills] the longest that we

have the hardest time with; they don't have an attachment to humans."

When the dogs first come in, many are terrified, and respond by shutting down or cowering in a corner. "For some of those dogs, we may not even take them out of the cage for socialization. We may just spend time walking by and tossing treats in their kennel. Some are so fearful, they won't even touch food in your presence," Campbell says.

The staff and volunteers at the Norfolk SPCA are dedicated to working with the dogs until they're adopted. The socialization process there often involves giving baths, touching them, taking them outside for playtime, taking them on a walk, or even taking them home for a night. Small steps like these can make a big difference. The SPCA of Texas, for instance, looks for low-stress ways of getting the dogs to trust them. A volunteer will take a book, and just sit and read in a dog's run for 30 minutes, not making eye contact at all. Soon, the dog will start coming around and will sit next to the volunteer,

not wanting to be touched yet, but sitting there calmly.

It's all about baby steps. Volunteers at The Humane Society of Oregon put leashes and harnesses on puppy mill dogs, and let them get used to wearing them, even if that simply means allowing the leashes to drag behind them on the floor. Then they'll try walking the dogs up and down in their runs, progressing to walks in the puppy mill pod, and, finally, they'll take them for walks outside.

Of course, this requires manpower, and few shelters have enough people on staff to individually socialize dozens of puppy mill dogs at once. That's why shelters such as the Oregon Humane Society and the Humane Society of Missouri have found it indispensable to have a group of trained volunteers to handle these tasks. They're often the backbone of rehabilitating the dogs; without them, the staff would be overwhelmed. "Our volunteers actually did log sheets every day when the animals were being worked with, the improvement, so we could track over time what was happening," Roberts says. "We would never have had the time to do that ourselves."

### Upcoming Legislation

Missourians for the Protection of Dogs / YES! on Prop B is leading a citizen-backed ballot initiative, The Puppy Mill Cruelty Prevention Act. Proposition B will be on the November 2010 ballot, allowing the public to vote the measure into law. The measure is designed to improve the lives of dogs in commercial breeding operations in Missouri.

### Do You Know My History?

The journey of puppy mill dogs through a shelter doesn't end there—the whole point of taking in the dogs in the first place is to find them homes! Staff and volunteers promote the arrival of the dogs, screen potential adopters, and find homes where the dogs will have the best chance of success. The good news is that while they're often fearful, rescued puppy mill dogs are rarely aggressive, and the majority do get used to being cuddled and cared for in a home environment. Many will also benefit from having another dog in the home for company.

To let its community know that puppy mill dogs will soon be available for adoption, the Oregon Humane Society sends out a press release about the dogs. The shelter also tries to target people who would likely be a good match, such as those who already have dogs of the same breed. Then the staff compiles written information highlighting the special needs of the dogs. "We put together a cheat sheet: 'This is what the challenges are, this is what the rewards can be, this is probably the best environment,'" Roberts says. "... Some of these dogs can't go to homes with toddlers, because they would just be terrified, or very active homes—you know, chaos."

When the SPCA of Tampa Bay plans an adoption event for a large number of puppy mill dogs, the shelter gets them ready for adoption, and then tells the community that these special pets are available—but that they do come with challenges. Some adopted dogs become their adopters' little shadows, never wanting to be apart, and they can suffer from separation anxiety. Still others have never bonded with people at all, and "when you



Puppy mill dogs can bring a blitz of great publicity for shelters that receive them. A volunteer (center) and Suzy Swims, director of operations at the Norfolk SPCA, show off two puppy mill dogs to the media as they leave the shelter for their new homes.

have a dog that doesn't give you any affection once you get it home, and you couldn't wait to get it, that can be disappointing for some people," Brooks says. "They adopted a pet to have a best friend, and some of them don't realize the challenges that come with these guys."

But when the word spreads that puppy mill dogs are ready for adoption, there's rarely a lack of interest. In fact, it's often terrific publicity for shelters. "It brings people in, and we've seen our adoption rates for our cats and larger dogs go up, because we have so many people coming in to look for these dogs," Swims says. "We've at times had a line of people wrapped around the building."

The Humane Society of Missouri has pre-adoption events, when the training and behavior department gives presentations for prospective owners, going over all the issues (timidity, potty training, long-term medical problems) that owners may not realize are involved. They're sent home with packets of information about puppy mill dogs, and the

staff can refer them to a local behaviorist and training clubs that offer classes for shy dogs. "I really have tried to put together as good a support staff as possible, because we owe it to these people, when we put these dogs into their homes, not to just leave them with no resources," Campbell says.

With the right support, Barnes has seen some dogs who were deeply affected by their suffering in puppy mills go on to make tremendous strides. One particular dog, who came from one of the SPCA of Texas' first puppy mill seizures, sticks out in her mind—a pointer mix the staff named Eeyore.

"It was probably like five or six years ago, and he was found at the back of the property, in a dog run that you couldn't even see, because the grass was so high. He had no hair, and he weighed about 25 pounds, and he should weigh about 60. And we actually didn't think he was going to live, let alone turn his behavior around," she says. The staff worked with him, and an employee ended up adopting him. Today, Barnes says, he looks like the perfect pointer. "You

would never know what he went through," she says.

"And I also think that there's a bond between the owner and the animal when they adopt a puppy mill dog. I don't want to sound all cheesy, but I think that dog knows that the adopter is doing something special."

When a shelter agrees to take in and rehabilitate a group of puppy mill dogs, the staff and volunteers have their work cut out for them. They'll likely experience frustration, heartbreak, and exhaustion. But the difficult process can also yield extraordinary rewards.

"To see them when they get their first bath or the first time they touch the grass ... We put them in big groups outside to play, and it's amazing to watch them," Swims says, choking up. "It's like their spirit hasn't been broken." AS



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## Amazing Gracie

**A journalist tracks a rescued puppy mill dog, exposing the breeding industry along the way**

**How do you put a face** on the immense suffering caused by puppy mills—the thousands of commercial dog-breeding operations that produce and sell millions of puppies each year—for unsuspecting people who have no idea of the cruel conditions in which these animals are raised?

In *Saving Gracie: How One Dog Escaped the Shadowy World of American Puppy Mills*, Carol Bradley met that challenge by describing the journey of one Cavalier King Charles spaniel rescued from years living in a cage as a breeding dog.

The dog who would become Gracie—she was initially known only as “No. 132”—was one of 337 puppies and breeding dogs rescued in a 2006 raid on Mike-Mar Kennel in Lower Oxford, Pa., by the Chester County SPCA and local law enforcement. The partners who operated the kennel were found guilty of multiple counts of animal cruelty and fined, and their operation was shut down. Bradley recounts the raid, the ensuing legal wrangling, and the happy ending for Gracie, who found her way to a loving owner and slowly transformed from a terrified creature who didn’t know how to interact with humans into a cherished pet.

This is the first book for Bradley, a longtime dog-lover and former full-time newspaper reporter who became aware of the huge problems with the dog-breeding industry when she covered a major puppy mill case in Montana in 2002. She went on to study animal law as a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University.

In this edited interview with writer Jim Baker, Bradley talks about the genesis of her book and what she hopes readers will learn from it.

**Animal Sheltering:** I really got into the opening of the story, where you depicted all the teamwork that was required to organize the raid, introducing the people, agencies, and shelters. Why was it so important to reconstruct this event in such detail?



Journalist Carol Bradley—seen here with her dogs, Chachi and Jillian—uses the story of Gracie, a Cavalier King Charles spaniel who was rescued from Pennsylvania puppy mill, to explore the abuses of the commercial dog-breeding industry.

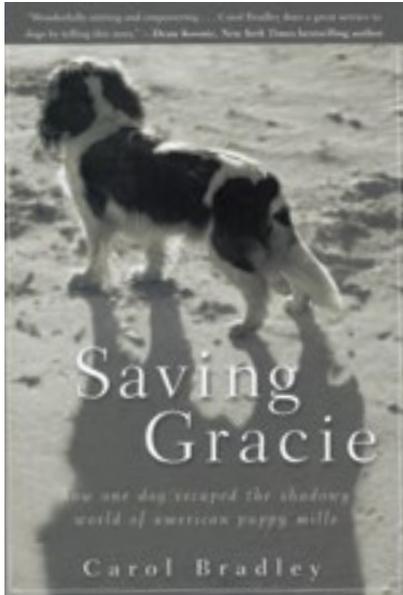
**Carol Bradley:** I wanted the book to read almost like an episode of *Law & Order* where you start at the beginning of the case, and go all the way through. I wanted to show people that puppy mills and puppy mill busts don’t just affect the dogs; they land on an entire community. Whole towns are sometimes stuck with 300 dogs. What are they going to do with them? I’ve always admired animal control officers, the people who really have to get in there and do the hard work. I wanted to show how difficult it was for them, because I think we sometimes forget. I was just looking for any possible way to tell the story in a way that would not make people want to throw the book across the room.

**What would make them want to do that?**

I think too much graphic detail. I waited until the second half of the book to get into other instances of puppy mills. I hope by the end of the book, people have a real sense of how awful these places are, and how *prolific* they are. But I didn’t want to hit them over the head with that too early on, because I didn’t want to lose readers, to be honest.

**It’s interesting that you mention that you wanted to structure it like a *Law & Order* episode, because it reads like a procedural in the early chapters, showing all the moving parts of a raid, who did what, and how that raid**

## [q&a]



**was carried out, even down to details like when the husband of one of your subjects brings her pizza, and she gets in her car and eats a few bites, and then she goes home and sleeps for two hours, fully clothed, and she can't get the smell of the puppy mill out of her hair. And the same care and level of detail went into your depiction of the legal case against the puppy mill's operators.**

I lucked out. In a lot of these puppy mill cases, the court hearing lasts all of about 15 minutes. In this case, there was a two-day trial, and the prosecutors were willing to hand me the transcript of the trial, and that helped enormously, because then I didn't have to piece together what was said. It was all there in black and white.

**What did you learn during the course of your research and writing that surprised you?**

I was real surprised to learn how big the Amish are into puppy mills. When people find that out, they're just shocked. But it's a cultural thing, I guess. [Many Amish] just can't imagine why anyone would have a dog in their house. But that was a big surprise. And just how many puppy mills there are. I guess I shouldn't be surprised how easily some breeders get off, because the community doesn't want to have to take in 400 dogs.

**How did you find Gracie and her adopter, Linda Jackson?**

I decided to take my agent's advice and focus on a single case. I liked the idea of finding a story in Pennsylvania, because so much was going on there, and it was a great setting to look at all sides of the puppy mill issue. When I started the book in 2006, they had not passed the Dog Law [the state's historic reform of the puppy mill industry, signed by Gov. Ed Rendell in October 2008]. But the rules are still being promulgated.

I had set the book in Pennsylvania, and then I started looking for a case that would exemplify the problem. The case of Mike Wolf was a great one to focus on, because it was big, and he was colorful. Then I went to the Chester County SPCA, the organization that had conducted the raid, and asked them for names of people to talk to who had adopted the dogs. I wound up finding Linda—thank goodness for Google—because I just stumbled upon a letter she had written to the Lebanon, Pa., newspaper. She said, 'I adopted one of the Chester dogs,' and she's expressing her fury at puppy mills, but this is all very new for her. And then I thought, "How much more interesting would it be to have a book about not just a dog that gets changed, but a person who gets changed because of the dog?" And so, I called her up, and she turned out to be a single mother of three, and as you've read, she had given away the last family dog [due to behavioral issues], which is kind of a big no-no in dog circles. But I thought, "You know, here's someone who's fallible." It's tempting when you're writing something like this to preach to the choir, but I wanted this book to appeal to people who like dogs, but maybe didn't know about puppy mills.

**What do you hope readers come away with?**

The best thing someone can say to me when they read the book is that they finished it, they read it. And they will often say, "I had no idea." I want them to be astonished, and galvanized. To say, "I'm never going to get a dog at a pet store again. I'm going to tell everyone I know never to do that." One person said to me, "I thought it wasn't a problem anymore, because I read a story about it 15 years ago, and I had no idea it's still a problem." And

people are shocked when they know it's as big a problem as it is. I often tell people, "Write your state legislators, and tell them they need to pass a law." I wanted to get to people who like a good story and like one where there's a happy ending. I thought it needed to have a happy ending, at least for Gracie.

**Gracie's story certainly ends on an optimistic note. Are you equally optimistic about the progress being made to regulate these cruel operations?**

I'm glad to see that people are starting to get galvanized. These things never happen quickly enough, and there's a difference between passing a bill and enforcing it, and putting the money behind it. Ideally, in this country we wouldn't have such a patchwork approach. I guess I wouldn't really be satisfied until the federal government passed a law and funded it and took the whole issue of commercial dog breeding out from under the [U.S.] Department of Agriculture, which always has a bias toward producers.

**You're obviously a dog lover yourself.**

My husband and I got our first dog ... about 13 years ago, and I knew nothing, I didn't know what a Lab was, I didn't know breeds at all, I didn't know anything about dogs. And we wound up with a sheltie puppy, so then I fell in love with shelties. But we went through a friend who was a breeder. I had no idea where you would find a dog. I had no idea that there were so many layers of complications about why you would not go to a pet store. But in the course of covering this case in Montana, I became aware of the overbreeding of dogs, the overpopulation of dogs, and we just decided it makes no sense to go to a breeder. If somebody wants to go to a breeder, they have in mind what they want, I'm not going to tell them that they shouldn't do that. But I'm not gonna do it myself anymore. **AS**

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**References:**

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## Whose Animal is it?

The importance of establishing ownership in surrender cases

BY CHERIE TRAVIS



**Each day across the country**, the staff working at intake desks at animal shelters are confronted with a variety of people giving up pets for a variety of reasons: they can no longer afford to care for them; they're moving and think they can't find pet-friendly housing in their new city; their pet has become aggressive. Some surrenders can be avoided with good counseling and medical or behavioral assistance; others are unsolvable and can be heartbreaking—though

even these can lead to positive outcomes when a new home for the animal can be found.

Surrenders present enough challenges without the more troubling cases, in which someone presents an animal for surrender and the shelter or rescue only finds out later that this person did not have the legal authority to do so.

These cases are infrequent, but the trouble they cause makes it worthwhile to con-

sider your organization's procedures. What documentation do you require in order to take in—and potentially adopt out—a surrendered animal?

For example, consider the following scenarios: Your shelter gets a visit from a woman who wants to surrender a cat. She says that she found him several months ago, and has been holding onto him while attempting to find his owner. She has posted numerous fliers in the area and at the local

## [humane law forum]

animal control facility in an attempt to find his owner.

Or perhaps a man comes into your municipal shelter with a dog he says is his. He says the dog bit him and requests that your facility euthanize the dog.

Animals are still considered property in every state in the country. But how do you know whether the person at your front desk is the animal's legal owner? Are you legally protected if you immediately put the cat up for adoption? What about if you put the dog to sleep, according to his apparent owner's request?

### It Ain't Necessarily So

In the Chicago area, both the situations above have occurred. Neither had a pleasant outcome.

A shelter took in a "found" dog and placed him with a new owner. Someone claiming to be the dog's original owner saw a picture of him on the "Adopted" section of the shelter's website, and contacted the media to protest the transfer of ownership.

The woman claimed to have visited animal control regularly to look for her pet and was willing to pay for a DNA test to prove that the dog was hers. The new adopter of the dog, who had acted in good faith, was none too happy about being dragged into the conflict. Ultimately, a DNA test determined that the adopted dog was not the one in question, but only after a great deal of unpleasantness and negative media coverage.

In the second scenario, a municipal shelter euthanized the dog later that afternoon. That evening, a woman came in with proof that she owned the dog and was devastated to learn that the dog had been killed as a result of her angry ex-boyfriend bringing the dog to the shelter and lying to staff.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to look to the law for clarity on this issue. Since animals are considered property, the term "owner" may be referenced in several places in the law. For example, for the purposes of establishing criminal or civil liability, many states (including Arizona, Maine, and Illinois) define an "owner" as a person who keeps or harbors



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an animal. Arizona's animal control statute defines owner as any person keeping an animal other than livestock for more than six consecutive days.

### Legal Loopholes

Such definitions can be useful when it comes to establishing wrongdoing; for example, a person who takes in a stray for a period of time but fails to provide proper care for that animal can be treated as an owner and held responsible for the animal's mistreatment. But the laws don't always address the transfer of ownership from one person to another. So while keeping an animal in Arizona for more than six consecutive days can make a person responsible for harm to the animal, it doesn't establish legal title, which can then be transferred to the shelter upon surrender.

Only a few states have settled the question for animal shelters. For example, California's Hayden law requires that animals relinquished by a "purported owner" be offered the same amount of hold time as stray animals (a minimum of four days, not including the day of impoundment) before euthanasia.

In the absence of legislation, it's smart for shelters and rescues to develop policies to ad-

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dress these concerns. Intake practices should include asking owners for their identification (such as a driver's license or state ID card) and for proof of ownership, including vet records; these documents should be photocopied and kept on file. If a person surrendering an animal cannot provide these documents, the animal should be treated as a stray and given a period of time for redemption.

This is especially important in cases of owner-requested euthanasia; if someone is surrendering an animal and asking that she be put to sleep, verifying that the person is the legal owner is particularly important. It may be smart to establish a standard, written hold policy for any surrendered animal (perhaps 24-48 hours), and stipulate that, in cases where ownership cannot be definitively proven, euthanasia will be performed only at the shelter's discretion.

A policy to treat surrendered animals whose ownership could not be definitively established would have prevented protracted litigation for a New York shelter. In *Feger v. Warwick Animal Shelter*, a white Persian cat was surrendered by an unidentified person and then placed into a new home. Plaintiff Darlene Feger claimed that the cat was actually Kisses, her champion purebred Persian cat who had been stolen from her home. Although the trial court dismissed the case, Feger appealed and won her case at the appellate level.

Language in an organization's relinquishment agreement should state clearly—preferably in bold or capital letters—that the person signing the form is representing that he or she is the legal owner of the animal and that a false statement on a legal document can be considered perjury or misrepresentation and will be punished to the fullest extent of the law. The shelter should consult with legal counsel to draft this agreement and to include applicable state law as to the punishment for perjury.

Additionally, most states require shelters to scan for microchips for stray animals. And even if you're in a state that doesn't require it, it's a basic practice: Sometimes a microchip can help you establish ownership quickly, and help you determine whether the person at your front counter deserves your sympathy and counseling, or whether their story deserves a little scrutiny. 

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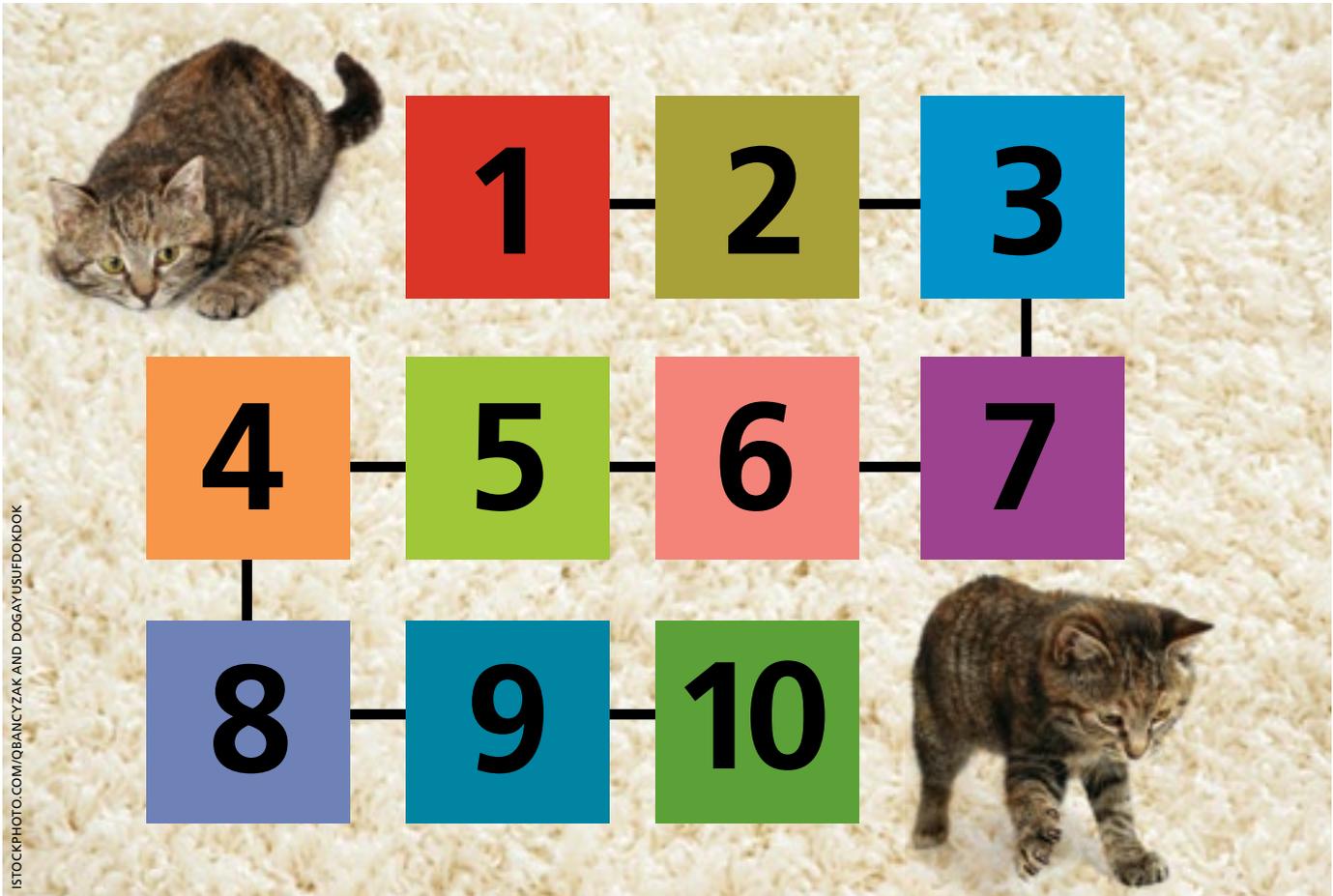
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## Turning Fearful Cats Friendly

Training method aims to make frightened cats more adoptable

BY ANGELA DRAKE RENTFRO



**My cat Archie is my confident, affectionate, cuddle-bug cat.** He melts in my arms for attention. But if he ever got lost and wound up in an animal shelter, he might quickly deteriorate into an “unadoptable” fearful cat. Potential adopters might walk by his cage and not give more than a brief glance at my gorgeous orange tabby. Archie would be practically invisible, crouching in the back of his cage in his litter box. If not for his microchip and ID tags, he might well end up euthanized.

People gravitate to cats who sit confidently at the front of their cages with their head, body, and tail held high. We all know that the more friendly cats seem, the more

likely people are to interact with them, which can lead to adoptions. As a longtime animal rescue foster parent and trap-neuter-return (TNR) volunteer, I have a special place in my heart for all of the feral cats and fearful cats who do not meet adoptability criteria, and thus are not likely to ever achieve their happily-ever-after ending. They are truly the underdogs (or undercats!) in the animal welfare world. Fearful or feral cats are not a lost cause; rather, they are a puzzle in need of a solution.

### A Better Way for Fearful Cats

I am impressed when I walk through an animal shelter and see cats and kittens put-

ting on the charm for their ever-changing audience. Some cats adapt beautifully to change—and a shelter setting is usually a big one. For a lot of cats, change can be frightening. Exposure to the unfamiliar settings, sights, sounds, and smells of a new environment makes it more likely the cat will behave fearfully. You can take a friendly cat from the comforts of his home and see him quickly transform into a fearful cat who would not be a candidate for adoption in a shelter. How can we set these fearful cats up for success, so they can achieve their happy endings?

During my tenure volunteering for animal welfare organizations and caring for homeless cats, it became obvious to me that much

## [behavior department]

common advice on handling cats—such as restraining them in towels—is often very stressful on the cat and potentially dangerous to people. The recommendations also tend to be limited to younger kittens, can be time-consuming (taking weeks, months, or years), and do not produce consistent results.

I was convinced that I could find a better way to help fearful and feral cats, so I pursued my master's degree at the University of North Texas' (UNT) behavior analysis department. The graduate program allows students to apply their knowledge of behavioral principles to a variety of areas to help humans and/or animals. Fortunately, I had the opportunity to be mentored by Dr. Jesús Rosales-Ruiz and play an active role in his applied animal behavior lab, known as the Organization for Reinforcement Contingencies with Animals (ORCA). The lab focuses on animal behavior research that improves the care and understanding of captive animals, and it offered me valuable guidance in animal behavior and training. Together, Dr. Rosales-Ruiz and I designed my master's thesis, *Fearful to Friendly*

(F2F): *Constructional Fear Treatment for Cats* and created an instructional F2F DVD.

The approach treats fear and aggression not as behavior triggered by the environment, but as "successful" behavior that minimizes or removes the threat. The treatment procedure involves the removal of low levels of threat (specifically, the presence of a person) as a reinforcer (reward) to shape friendly behaviors. When rewarded for friendly behaviors by having a stressor removed, the cat learns that behaving fearfully or aggressively will not cause the stressor to go away—but friendly behaviors will. We wanted to develop a fast, safe, systematic approach to turning feral cats and kittens into friendly companion animals and training fearful cats to show better in an adoption environment—but the F2F process is not limited to socializing feral and fearful cats. The procedure can be modified to help a wide variety of domestic and exotic fearful animals. The research was an extension of work Dr. Rosales-Ruiz and his students have done on fear and aggression in animals.

## Getting Started

Before I implement the F2F procedure, I make sure the cat is comfortably housed in the top level of a cat condo located in a quiet room with minimal human traffic. Today, I will be working with a neutered 6-month-old gray tabby feral kitten named Marvin. Over the next two days, my objective is to progress through the five conditions of the F2F procedure: approaching the cat condo, opening the cage door, brushing him, getting Marvin to approach me, and petting him. Each of the five conditions are broken down into smaller goals called "shaping steps." Once these conditions are mastered, I will release him from the cat condo and work with him in other rooms in my house.

During the process, in the approaching condition, I place numbered sheets of paper on the floor, with the lowest number at the door and the highest number at the entrance to the cat condo. The overall goal is to reach the cat condo entrance, but I use numbered squares as smaller goals as I progress to the cage entrance. I walk toward the kitten in the cat condo, then stop at a preplanned destination and observe the kitten's behavior. I reward Marvin's friendly behavior by leaving the room for 15 to 30 seconds.

For example, at one point in the process, I move to a new shaping step by progressing from both feet on square five to left foot on square five and right foot on square six. From that position, I observe the kitten lying belly down with his head held low, his legs pulled in tightly to his body, and his tail tucked under his body. He is staring at me with wide, circular eyes. It is difficult to discern his eye color because his black pupils are enlarged despite the bright lights—a clear sign of stress. I know from previous experience that if I progress through my shaping steps too quickly, that will add too much pressure to the kitten, which results in more intense behaviors, such as hissing, growling, arching back, and hair standing up.

Since Marvin is a "statue cat"—essentially frozen and not offering many behaviors—I will reward him for small movements to get the shaping game going. F2F breaks down the overall goal of the kitten behaving in a friendly manner into smaller behaviors, such as blinking and stretching. I leave the room

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LUCAS RENTFRO

Angela Drake Rentfro is completing her master of science degree in behavior analysis at the University of North Texas (UNT) with a specialization in applied animal behavior. She completed, with honors, her bachelor of science degree in behavior analysis with a minor in biology at UNT in 2001. She is now pursuing her Ph.D. in applied gerontology at UNT with a specialization in behavioral gerontology.

when Marvin breaks eye contact with me by turning his head slightly to the left—a desirable behavior because it’s the first movement he offers. On the next trial, I will return to the same location and wait for him to either offer me a better version of head turning (such as turning his head further away or in a new direction) or for him to offer a new behavior, such as blinking or moving his tail or legs further away from his body.

The trials are brief, lasting approximately one minute. I am looking for the slightest changes in behavior, so I can deliver a reward, which often keeps the game fun so the kitten will keep playing. At a later point in the process, I am nearing the cage door as I progress to square 21. However, before I can reach my destination, the kitten pulls his body back away from me, tucking more tightly into the corner of the cage. This distancing movement is considered an undesirable behavior, so I

freeze at square 19 and wait for a few seconds for him to relax and offer a friendly behavior. On an unsuccessful trial (one where an undesirable behavior occurred), I am looking for the slightest acceptable behavior for which I can quickly issue a reward, so that I can keep the trial brief. I do not want to put any unnecessary pressure on an already frightened animal by lingering. The time to learn is not when the kitten is stressed out, but rather when he is relaxed. For that reason, I will work on obtaining more desirable behaviors on successful trials (those where the kitten is only emitting desirable behaviors).

Marvin watches me for a moment and then I notice his eyelids quivering, and I respond by leaving the room. I am very generous on unsuccessful trials and will reward for the slightest desirable behavior (such as an eye flutter). Since this trial was unsuccessful

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ful at square 19, on the next trial I will backtrack slightly to square 18. I set the kitten up to succeed by returning to a prior shaping step where he was successful, and then I proceed from there.

I have achieved my criterion for the approaching condition. I can walk from the room entrance to the cat condo entrance, and Marvin's behavior is friendly. I can repeat this several times and still he only offers friendly behaviors. Now I am ready to start the opening-the-cage-door condition.

I begin simply by raising one hand toward the cage door; if that succeeds, on the next trial I will raise both hands. As I progress, I can eventually pull the cage door down one inch from the cage door latch. The cage door condition concludes with me holding the horizontal cat condo door at waist level, completely open, creating a bridge between me and the feral kitten inside the cage.

2

Marvin has now allowed the scary monster (me) into his cage. At this point in the procedure, he is lying on his side with all of his legs stretched far away from his body. He is comfortably resting the side of his head on the cardboard cat scratcher. His pale green eyes are half closed, and his whiskers are relaxed, not flared apart. His tail is no longer tucked under his body. Instead, he proudly displays his exquisite tiger-striped tail by draping it off one side of the cat scratcher. When I open the room door, he now greets me by offering paw stretches and a variety of other previously reinforced behaviors.

I progress to the beginning stages of the brushing condition. I take my brush (taped to a wooden dowel) and inch my way closer to the kitten's head with each trial. At first, the dowel is long enough so that I can reach the kitten at any location in the cat condo without putting my hand near him. Over time, I

3

gradually ease my hand up the length of the dowel, so that I am holding the brush; later, I will remove the wooden dowel altogether. My objective is to be able to brush Marvin on both sides of his head, the top of his head, both sides of his body, along his backbone, and down his tail—all while he is behaving in a friendly manner.

### Rewarding Friendly Behavior

After three hours of rewarding for friendly behaviors, I have almost completed the F2F procedure with the feral kitten in the top level of the cat condo. I can approach him in the cage, open the cage door, and brush him. At this point, I experience the beautiful moment that we deem the "switchover point," in which the reward for the kitten changes. I have switched from being an aversive stimulus to a positive stimulus. Marvin no longer demonstrates aggressive or fear-

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ful behaviors to try to escape or avoid me; instead, he emits friendly behaviors to solicit my attention. Now that the brushing condition is complete, I will come back this afternoon and do some follow-up brushing trials with Marvin.

The next day, I assess Marvin's behavior in the cat condo, and am greeted with a cheerful meow. Without any additional training, Marvin approaches me at the cage door—purring, rubbing against objects in the cage, holding his head, body, legs, and tail high, and allows me to pet him. He uses the cage door as a bridge to walk across to unite us as he confidently strides out of the safety of his cage to meet with his new companion. I am now ready to repeat the F2F procedure as needed to train Marvin to behave in a friendly way on the bottom level of the cat condo and outside of the cage (which is known as generalization training).

The F2F results have been outstanding. The results of my master's thesis show that going from fearful to friendly can be done in a matter of hours. After the implementation of F2F, "unadoptable" feral kittens were behaving in friendly ways, approaching people, and soliciting petting in the condo. When a feral or fearful cat meets adoptability criteria in the cat condo, then we assess his behavior in new environments (new rooms in a house, in a foster environment, etc.) and with new people. In cases where generalization of friendly behaviors does not occur, generalization is programmed by repeating the F2F procedure in those environments. The more that you do the procedure, the faster it goes.

The F2F treatment package utilizes a constructional approach, meaning that we are constructing new friendly behaviors that we want to see more of rather than concentrating on reducing fear and aggression. In the F2F logic, the animals did not have emotional control—not because they were fearful, but because they did not know what else to do in those situations. The new behaviors the animal learns become so effective in getting the animal what he wants that the undesirable behaviors are no longer necessary, and thus are no longer presented.

F2F is designed to set the animal up for success and produce minimal stress. The threat, or aversive stimulus, is presented in such a way as not to produce an intense fear

### Resources

Visit [fearfultofriendly.com](http://fearfultofriendly.com) for information about the Fearful to Friendly procedure or to purchase the instructional DVDs *Fearful to Friendly (F2F): Constructional Fear Treatment for Cats* and *Behavior Identification Game for Cats*.

Kit Jenkins, grants manager for PetSmart Charities, offers advice on recognizing and reducing stress in cats in shelters or foster homes on the PetSmart Charities blog, linked at [bit.ly/cl009q](http://bit.ly/cl009q).

Information on the University of North Texas' Organization for Reinforcement Contingencies with Animals (ORCA) program is available at [orgs.unt.edu/orca](http://orgs.unt.edu/orca).

For more information, see *Animal Sheltering's* articles "Scaredy Cat or Feral Cat?" at [animalsheltering.org/frightened\\_ferals](http://animalsheltering.org/frightened_ferals); and "The Way to Tame a Feral Kitten's Heart," at [animalsheltering.org/taming\\_feral\\_kittens](http://animalsheltering.org/taming_feral_kittens).

response or a long-lasting fear response. The aim at each trial is to stay below the "fear threshold" where undesirable responses occur. The trainer changes his or her behavior according to changes in the cat's behavior. The subject is never wrong: if the cat is doing something the trainer does not like, then the trainer is likely doing something the cat does not like.

F2F offers a systematic solution to transform fearful behavior into friendly behavior. This procedure can be used to shape feral and fearful felines into affectionate companion cats who meet adoptability criteria. Fearful to Friendly is dedicated to all the frightened animals who were too scared and skittish to have the opportunity to find new homes. My wish is that this life-saving research will find its way to our fearful animal friends around the globe and give them their time to shine and the potential to find their happy endings. 

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**THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES**

## Bringing the Holidays Home

In the nation's capital, a few humane officers spend Christmas bringing toys to forgotten pooches

BY CARRIE ALLAN



CARRIE ALLAN/THE HISS

Officer Ann Russell of the Washington Humane Society pays a visit to one of the guard dogs who has benefited from the shelter's winter holiday delivery program.

In Washington, D.C., the winter holidays are a mixed bag. Politicians have flown back home, so Capitol grounds are quieter. The days hover just around freezing but are typically snowless. Lights and glowing plastic Santas decorate some neighborhoods, while other parts of the city remain dark, the only decorations the graffiti on the walls of abandoned businesses. Shoppers fight for parking spaces, kitchens fill with tantalizing smells, and families gather to celebrate and bicker.

Meanwhile, in lots around the nation's capital, dozens of guard dogs do not know it's Christmastime at all. For them, it's just another day tethered in a rocky lot or pacing a chain-link fence patrolling for intruders—or

so it was until, more than 10 years ago, a humane officer from the Washington Humane Society decided to play Santa.

While making his rounds back then, Adam Parascandola was struck by the city's guard dogs. Now the director of animal cruelty issues at The Humane Society of the United States, Parascandola saw them as the loneliest of animals. "Most of them are really sweet, and they just want attention," he says.

He began to take toys and treats to them, eventually making the practice an official shelter program during the holidays. Parascandola doesn't have kids, so he tried to work on Christmas Day so officers with fami-

lies could stay home. Delivering the toys then was both symbolic and practical: Few people were around, allowing him to check on the dogs' health and well-being without getting into an argument with their sometimes less-than-friendly owners.

When Parascandola took a new job in California, others stepped in to play elf. "We start making notes a couple months before Christmas. We make a list and we check it twice," jokes humane officer Ann Russell.

On Christmas Day, a small cadre—sometimes accompanied by partners or spouses to make the ritual more fun—divide the city into quadrants and head out to the lots on their list. Instead of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, they bring treasures dogs will actually enjoy—usually donated Kongs, stuffed with frozen peanut butter and treats—and drop them off with animals who, on Christmas Day, may not see a single soul, much less get so much as a scratch behind the ears.

Because many dogs were used to patrol the lots, a citywide crackdown on black market car sales has had an unintended but welcome effect, Russell is happy to report: reduction in the number of guard dogs. "It's interesting to see that connection between different types of crime and how one getting reduced affects another."

Once on a checkup of a dog who hadn't been visited in a while, Russell and a fellow officer found a vacant lot. Her colleague remembered seeing poorly treated animals there, but now saw only remnants of the pens, including the elevated wood pallet where a makeshift doghouse had once stood.

But the most poignant sign of the previous tenants was a single, chewed-up Kong toy, delivered by Washington Humane Society officers on a previous Christmas. It was, Russell says, probably the only toy those dogs ever got. [AS](#)



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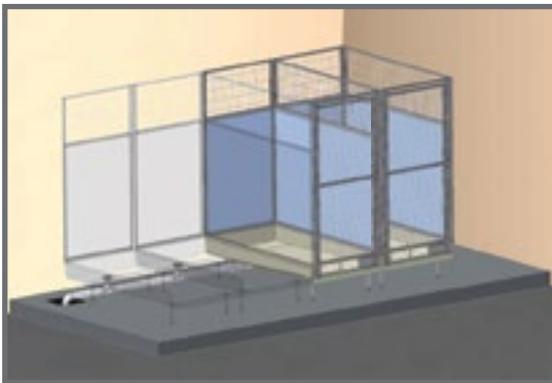


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