

Wags to wishes: Humane Society hopes to end euthanasia

SUFFOLK

Wagging tails and pleading eyes touch the hearts of Suffolk Humane Society members, but the organization is about more than cuddling animals. Through humane education programs, volunteers spread the word about responsible pet ownership and advocate for the welfare of the companion animals.

The volunteer group, which was founded in 2007 and is 200 members strong, focuses on adoption, placing pets in foster homes and spay and neuter programs to control the city's pet overpopulation.

In its first year, the society, working with other animal welfare groups, including Suffolk Animal Control, sponsored numerous adopt-a-thons and scheduled regular visits from the Neuter Scooter. The large bus, outfitted with a miniclinic, offers affordable neutering and spaying of up to 30 animals a day.

The society partnered with "Meals on Wheels" to have four tons of pet food delivered to meal recipients who needed help caring for their pets.

And when the April tornado demolished the Harmony House in Driver, it also wiped out one of the society's major fostering sites and Neuter Scooter stop. In spite of the tornado setbacks, the Suffolk Humane Society earned a "Shelter of the Week" designation from SPCA International in May. With the recognition came a check for \$1,000.

The cash is a small step toward the society's primary mission of ending euthanasia of animals that cannot be kept when the city's animal control shelter is stretched beyond capacity. The shelter has 48 dog kennels and 16 cat cages to hold abandoned and adoptable pets, as well as those being held in protective custody.

Although the society has made strides over its brief history, its major mission of building a permanent shelter remains in the works.

Angie Chandler, society executive director, said the plans are fluid, but the estimated cost will run about \$10 million. The society hopes to find corporate and foundation sponsors for the new shelter that Chandler envisions as a light-filled, fun gathering place for pets and their people. She hopes for a planned pet community that might include a pet boutique, a café and an educational center all in a green, sustainable building with a dog park.

"Obviously that's a ways away, but it would just be good for everyone," she said. "And that's what we're working toward."

Fundraisers like today's inaugural Mutt Strut may bring the dream of a new shelter and dog park closer to reality - or enough to make any kitten purr and any pup wag his tail.

As Sunday's Mutt Strut Dog Walk and Festival approaches, meet a few local animals whose journeys had happy endings.

Pet stories: The tail end

Lucy Low Rider

Lucy Low Rider never knew what the ground felt like. She had spent her entire life in a cramped cage as the result of living in a puppy mill.

I call her Lucy Low Rider because of her short legs. She is actually a type B Rat Terrier, which are bred to be small and stocky.

Lucy came from Suffolk Animal Control in March of 2008. She was infected with heart worm and had lived her life in a cage producing puppies.

It took my husband a month before he could touch her, but now they are best buddies.

She loves to investigate and has also become a 'clepper! She steals anything not nailed down and carries it off. She can drag a full bathrobe and she only weighs 8 pounds!

She is in rescue and up for adoption. She will make someone a delightful companion, but they will have give her time to warm up and need to be patient with her.

Cindy Confer

Misty

Misty is a Min-Pin that was a neglect case from Suffolk Animal Control.

Misty was brought into SAC when she was so sick that she wasn't expected to make it. It could never be determined if someone had done something purposely to her or if it was a physical problem that got out of control, but she was in desperate shape in November of last year. The first two months that I had her, she had to be bathed every night to soothe her wounds. She was covered with burn cream and then slept in a baby T-shirt to keep the medicine on the raw areas. She was on antibiotics for three months and was on supplements and about every over-the-counter cream and salve that you can imagine.

Even at her sickest, she never nipped in pain. She just wants to be with someone. She is remarkable to have been through all she has, yet she loves every person that she has ever met - from babies to the elderly. What an amazing spirit she has.

Cindy Confer

Gatsby

Most people who go to an animal shelter, I assume, are planning on going home with a new pet. I was not in that majority. I went to the Suffolk Animal Shelter last spring to write an article about the All Night Adopt-a-Thon.

Before going to the shelter, I kicked around the idea of getting a pet. But, it wasn't until I saw this black and white, 9-month-old pit bull puppy that I knew I was ready.

All of the dogs were jumping up and down and going crazy for attention. All the dogs, except Gatsby, who was sitting down, relaxed and wonderfully tempered. I walked up to his cage and spoke to him, but it wasn't until I got down on his level that he came to the front of the pen.

I thought this dog had the perfect personality for my home.

Before I could write any article, I was writing my name on the adoption papers.

That was about six months ago, and in that time I had have a blast with him. He really has been a great addition to my home, as well as my life.

Lauren Wicks

Raka

We took our dog Raka (front, in photo), also a rescue, to the Suffolk Animal Shelter to find him a playmate. Raka wasted no time in inspecting the other dogs, but immediately went to Taz's cage. It was love at first sight and an instant bond between all of us.

We don't know much about Taz's history, except that he was all alone on the streets. But he made himself right at home. He is happy go lucky, but with manners. It has been almost a year since we rescued him and every day he shows his gratitude. He loves to run, sleep on his back, and, oh, can he lick.

At times he has a far-away look in his eyes as if he remembers the days before he came to us. It doesn't last long. I hope he feels lucky, because we sure are lucky to have such a great addition to the family.

Tim and Marlene Maloney

In the past six years, we've loved four pets. I said that I would never get another one, but, time

heals, and both of us began to hunger for a pet's unconditional love. While my husband began checking the classified ads, I began searching the Web. I found one precious little beagle at the Suffolk Animal Control Shelter. I immediately called and found out it had been adopted.

However, through that site, I contacted Kaye Makarski and I became involved in volunteering. So when Kaye heard of another beagle showing up, she immediately told me. We went the same day and adopted it.

As it turns out, this is the same pup that I called about the first time. It seems someone adopted him, but didn't have time for him. He's very lively and very loving. My husband and I are senior citizens and he's giving us quite a workout, which we badly need. We love him so much and are thankful we were able to get him.

Linda Darner

Boris

We adopted our cat Boris from the PetSmart, shortly after the last of our previous cats had died at age 20.

Boris is a very big boy. He even has some extra toes, seven on each of his front and back paws, but he is a gentle sweetheart. He is very laid back and doesn't get into much trouble. He's the perfect buddy for your cold Sunday afternoon on the couch. I'm cold natured, but he's my personal heater in the winter.

And boy does Boris love food. We have to be sure to keep the lowest shelf of the refrigerator fully stocked. If there's the least bit of available room, he'll climb in every time you open the door. It's a tussle to get him out because he can really hold on tight to the back of the shelf.

He's also recently become obsessed with bagels. I left a package out on the counter and the next morning, the package was on the floor, chewed through. He had munched about a bagel and a half. At least the were Weight Watcher bagels, and he did pass on breakfast that morning!

Vicki Ellis

Goliath

As my husband and I walked through the Suffolk Animal Shelter, we had hopes of finding a new dog that would blend in with our family and farm.

We had recently lost my shepherd/chow rescue after nine years and a week later, our bulldog passed away. I was devastated. My friend worked with Animal Control and recommended that I go to look at a shepherd mix.

As his soft milk chocolate eyes met mine, I knew he was destined to come home with us. I looked at my husband and it was over. He, too, had been taken in by those soft Hershey-colored eyes.

Goliath became our pound pup who has been the most wonderful, clown-like pup. He's playful, talkative, a willing and avid learner and best yet, he's house-trained. Pretty good for a pup found abandoned on a road.

He has filled the void that was left in my heart by the passing of our other two canine friends. Is it possible that our other dogs sent us to find Goliath? Some days I wonder, but I'm just glad to have a new canine best friend.

Michelle Schmoll

Ginger

To watch Ginger trot around the backyard with her "brother" Gunther, a long-haired daschund, it's hard to imagine how different her story was just one year ago.

Word started circulating around the Harbour View area of north Suffolk in July 2007 about a stray dog that was dodging traffic. Strangers would try to lure the dog with burgers, but she was too frightened to let them close enough to grab her.

As summer wore on, the elusive dog was getting skinnier.

On Aug. 28, 2007, Linda Vetter was leaving her Riverfront home in Harbour View when she caught a glance of the stray in the neighbor's front yard. Linda immediately returned her dog Sadi to the house and grabbed some biscuits and a bowl of water.

Almost two hours later, the dog that would come to be named Ginger was safe.

After an unsuccessful adoption run in the SAC, Ginger returned to Linda's house and began the long recovery from her traumatic experience.

Then hope came in a voicemail. Donna Douglas had seen Ginger on the PetFinder page and was touched by all that Ginger had been through.

Now, Ginger takes every opportunity to head for the water.

Linda Vetter

Causey and Lilly

At the vet's last month, I heard of two cats whose owner was trying to find them a new home. Because of a divorce and subsequently putting his house on the market, the owner planned to take

the cats to the Suffolk shelter. We both tried for three weeks to find a new home for them, but were unsuccessful.

So, I took the cats and fostered them. They are brother and sister. Causey, the male, looks Siamese with blue eyes, while Lilly, the female, is dark grey with white splotches.

In the best of all possible worlds, we would like to keep these cats together since they behave so well together and would really miss each other. The kitten season, as well as the economy, has intervened with our finding a new home for these cats.

They are "ready-made comfort" and unconditional love and companionship for the right, new owners. If we did not already have a house "popping at the seams," with cats, we would keep these ourselves.

Linda Beale

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Source URL (retrieved on 04/03/2009 - 23:23): <http://hamptonroads.com/2008/09/wags-wishes-humane-society-hopes-end-euthanasia>