

AWLA Connects Animals With Prospective Adopters

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Molly Edwards
and friends


PET GAZETTE

SUMMER 2014

A New Approach To Adoptions

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Alexandria
Gazette Market 

PHOTO BY LAURA SUDDER

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PET GAZETTE

'They Need One-On-One Attention'

AWLA connects animals with prospective adopters.

BY KARA COLEMAN
GAZETTE PACKET

When the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria received a report that a lion was running loose in the community, its staff went to find it. But what they found wasn't a lion; it was a Husky with a shaved body.

"I could kind of see how it looked like a lion, from far away," said Megan Webb, executive director of AWLA. "It's funny that that's what people's minds jumped to, though."

If it had been a lion, though, AWLA would be the group to call. AWLA is responsible for animal services in the City of Alexandria, and also trains dogs, operates an animal shelter, and provides humane education classes for children.

"We want to be the place that people come to if they need care for animals," Webb said.

AWLA has 27 full- and part-time staffers and more than 150 volunteers. Volunteers are now able to be actively involved in the adoption process. Previously, potential adopters had to wait to meet with staff members to go through the adoption process. Webb is hoping to adopt more animals out more quickly by having the extra help. She said that in 2013, AWLA placed 1,041 animals in homes. As of last month, the group has adopted out 600 animals to families so far in 2014.

AWLA takes animals that have been rescued as well as animals that have to be given up due to their owners dying, moving to a nursing home, or being deployed. According to Webb, the group has also been working with Potomac Highlands Animal Res-



Not a lion: It's a Husky with a shaved body.

cue in Cabins, W. Va., for more than 17 years.

"They have a hard time finding adopters in West Virginia," said Webb. "Almost every Saturday they bring us animals for adoption."

AWLA deals with wild as well as domestic animals.

"We get a lot of service calls for wild animals, anything from deer that have been injured to raccoons in attics," Webb said. "We just got a group of baby possums. Sometimes, when a mother possum gets hit by a car and her babies are in her pouch, the mom dies and the babies get left behind. So our officers go and rescue them."

The AWLA works with local veterinary clinics that provide medical services at discounted rates to the animals who need care before they are ready for adoption. Webb said that while some animals need medical care before they can be placed with a fam-

ily, some animals need a different kind of care.

"Our foster program is very important," Webb said. "We get a lot of animals that have special needs and are not quite ready for adoption: puppies and kittens who are not old enough to be adopted, senior animals who don't do well in the shelter, scared and frightened animals, they need one-on-one attention."

Broc (formally Bruce), an AWLA alum, had a great day with his buddy Jack and his mom Elizabeth Ramsay at Pups in the Park at a Nationals game.



Willow

Animal Welfare League of Alexandria has a number of business partners in the community to help provide care to its shelter animals. For example, here is Willow. She was injured and extremely fearful when she was transferred into the shelter. AWLA treated her injury but she was terrified of people. She would sit in the back of the kennel and hide when people came by — making it difficult for her to get adopted. Dogtopia, a local dog daycare and boarding facility, agreed to take her in for a few weeks since she seemed to be more comfortable with other dogs than people. Willow quickly met friends at Dogtopia which helped reveal her real personality, build her confidence and ultimately get adopted.



PETS IN ALEXANDRIA

This is our cat Cinco, and he came from the Arlington County Animal Shelter



five years ago. I have lived in Alexandria for 49 years. My husband Max Rotermund and I have lived in the Beverly Hills area for over 29 years. Cinco is very helpful. When I lie on the floor and do my yoga stretches every morning, he "helps" me by doing them with me.

— Susan D. Dawson



Country Cat

PHOTO BY LAURA SUDDER



PHOTO BY NATASHA EDWARDS

This is Tina Edwards.

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PET GAZETTE



The new love of my life: Paisley the Puggle! We got Paisley three months ago from a breeder in Tennessee and our lives are just changed forever. She is a ball full of fun. She is totally adjusting to life as an Old Town dog and loves cruising down the parkway to my parents. Here Paisley is waiting with me in the car at the Braddock Road Metro; this is the moment she sees her Aunt Paige. She is just smiling, happy.

— **Brittany Patterson**



PHOTO BY LAURA SUDDER

Surie and Anya in the St. Pat's Parade.



Luna is like a second child to us. She is a Braque due Bourbonnais, a French breed of gun dog, and one of the first dogs that Kevin, my husband, trained at the Olde Towne School for Dogs. When obedience school ended, we saw Luna every once in a while, but we missed having her around. Now, four years later, we are so excited that Luna will joining us on our new venture as the honorary first member of our new dog gym in Alexandria, Frolick Dogs. Needless to say, Luna has a great time romping around the agility course when she visits our gym and we couldn't be happier to have her back in our family.

— **Kara Batt**



PHOTO BY LAURA SUDDER

Sophie, just a drop!



PHOTO BY NATASHA EDWARDS

Bocephus



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HC



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Belly Cat



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CELEBRATING 10 Years

A New Approach to Adoptions at AWLA

BY AMANDA HEINCER
ANIMAL WELFARE LEAGUE OF ALEXANDRIA

People seeking to adopt animals from the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria may notice some changes in the shelter's approach to adoptions. By partnering with the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to evaluate its adoption process, AWLA discovered that some of its previous policies and procedures were likely screening out people who could have been great adopters.

The new adoption process is designed to make it more welcoming and more educational for potential adopters. AWLA staff members are now trained to ask potential adopters open-ended questions that initiate conversations rather than depending on questions that have a defined "right" or "wrong" answer.

AWLA's Pet Calendar Contest

Make your pet a superstar by entering the 2015 Alexandria Animals Pet Photo Calendar Contest. For \$25, your animal will be guaranteed a place in the calendar, plus you will receive a free copy. Get your friends and family to vote for your pet to be the 2015 cover model. All funds raised will benefit the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria. Contest runs July 15 – Sept. 15. Enter online at www.AlexandriaAnimals.org/calendar. For more information or to become a sponsor, call 703-746-4774.

Katie Faxon, adoptions and community outreach manager, said, "Our focus is on good conversations and customer service. It's about having mutual respect for each other." Volunteers are now assisting with the adoption process by showing animals to the public; this decreases waiting time to visit animals and volunteers can share their personal experience with the animals with potential adopters.

The open-adoptions approach also emphasizes working with people to solve problems and match them with the right animals for their individual situation. "I have been excited to see the many more adoption matches we can make when we eliminated the automatic list of reasons to deny an adoption," said Faxon.

For example, a man who did not have a permanent residence came to the shelter seeking to adopt a cat. In the past, the shelter would have automatically denied his adoption because he was technically homeless.

However, the staff talked to him at length and discovered that he drove a large truck across country and wanted a cat as companion. Based on the information the man provided, the staff introduced him to a cat

who absolutely loves human attention and the two immediately bonded. He now has a riding companion — and the cat has human attention all day and night.

Studies have shown that people who are denied an adoption at a shelter generally become frustrated with the entire adoption process and turn to a breeder or a pet store instead.

AWLA's goal is to build a mutually respectful relationship with people and help them to think through what it means to be responsible for a pet rather than simply denying their adoption.

Since making the changes in approach to adoptions in early May 2014, the adoptions numbers are trending up. The AWLA adopted out 224 dogs and cats to loving homes from May 1, 2014, to June 30, 2014, nearly twice as many as in the same period last year.

PETS IN ALEXANDRIA



Growing up on the streets of West Virginia, nice people sent Boulder to the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria to find a forever home. The Forbes Family of Alexandria (Ripley/Diana/Meredith/Jonathan) adopted him last February and the action hasn't stopped. He is a very special breed — American Shorthair Brown Dog. He is one of a kind and has his own Instagram account (boulder3504) to chronicle his new life and love of every activity. Paddleboarding with his favorite bud Jonathan is his latest hobby and a perfect summer excuse to get out on the water. Here Boulder is encouraging his captain for one more ride.

— Ripley Forbes

Meet Mollie Bear, a 5-year old lab/chow mix we found on the side of a highway in rural Virginia eating a watermelon rind when she was about three months old. Her tail had just been cut off and it was still bleeding. A local animal rescuer said that this adorable puppy may have escaped people using her to train pit bulls to fight. We intended to bring her to the Alexandria animal shelter for adoption, but we found her at the beginning a five-day weekend over Thanksgiving, and by the time we got back to Alexandria, we couldn't let her go. After a lifetime of owning great dogs we have say she is the best dog we have ever had. She is charming, smart, funny, totally engaged, very trusting in spite of her rough start in life, and goes almost everywhere with my husband Michael Seith. As an aside, a week later another puppy from the same litter was turned in with his tail also cut off, and he was adopted by my sister. Jack has also turned out to be a very special dog and they are lucky to have him.

— Mary Hurlbut



Coco Chanel looking tres chic in her "Doggles." Coco is a 14-year-old senior Yorkie with vision problems and sensitivity to sunlight. So in order to continue Coco's strolls through Old Town, you will see her sporting her blue "Doggles" as a necessity and fashion statement. The Hope Eye center in Vienna, where Coco is being treated, loved this photo so much that they made it their screen saver.

— Renee Reymond



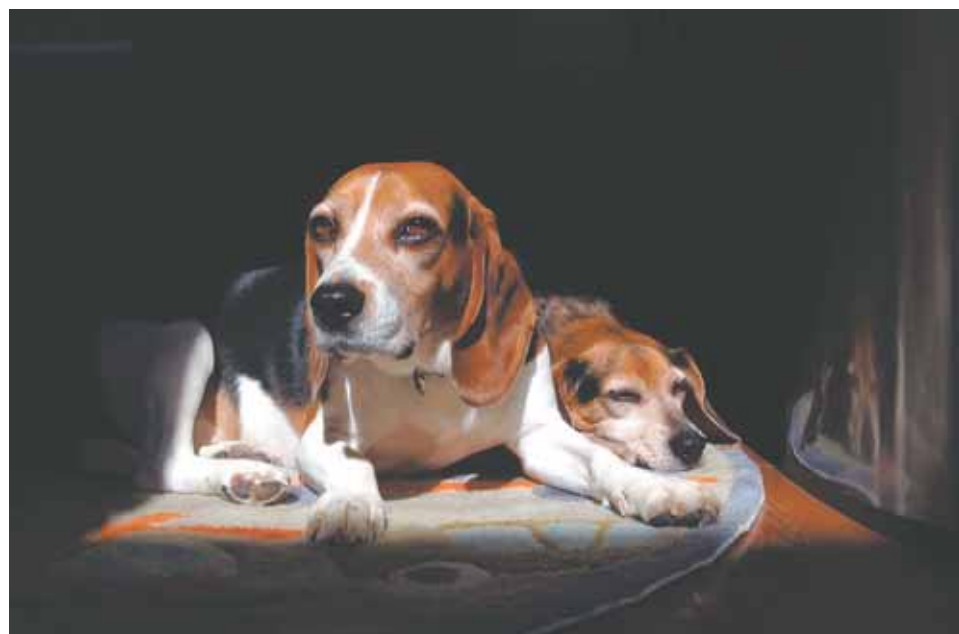
George, wearing Doggles, loves to hang his head out the window. Here are George and Paisley, cruising around town checking out the latest real estate.

— Phyllis Patterson,
The Patterson Group



PHOTO BY LAURA SUDDER

Richard Weber at the Athenaeum
with HC.



Oscar and Riley, beagle companions to Kara, Nathan, and Simon Macek of Alexandria, find a comfortable spot to bask in the sun.

— Nathan M. Macek