



PET GAZETTE

SUMMER 2014

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Charlie Bruno, a 3-year-old Japanese Chin, enjoys spending time outdoors and jumping in the leaves.

Mount Vernon Gazette

PHOTO BY VERONICA BRUNO

PET GAZETTE



'They Need One-On-One Attention'

AWLA connects animals with prospective adopters.

BY KARA COLEMAN
THE GAZETTE

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 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.

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED



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PETS IN MOUNT VERNON



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



Thomas Bruno and his Japanese Chin puppy, Leesha, love hanging out with each other.

— Veronica Bruno

Dogs, Cats and Even Horses

Humane Society of Fairfax County seeks adopters.

BY KARA COLEMAN
THE GAZETTE

According to the Humane Society of the United States 2013 Annual Report, 118,328 animals were cared for last year by the Humane Society and its affiliates, through disaster relief, cruelty interventions, wildlife rehab centers and more. But that number doesn't count the local rescue groups around the country who work to protect, shelter, and rehabilitate animals and adopt them out to homes, including many in Northern Virginia.

Marlene Hammer, corresponding secretary for the Humane Society of Fairfax County, said that the local organization currently has dogs, cats, rabbits, horses, and a ferret up for adoption.

"Our main goal is to adopt as many animals as we can out," she said. "By having people adopt, we can take in more animals."

The Humane Society of Fairfax County has a main office in Fairfax and a farm in Centreville. The farm is home to horses as well as 27 dogs.

A full-time manager lives on the farm to care for the animals, and if people want to adopt a horse or dog from the farm, they must go through the manager to apply.

The Fairfax office is also a home for cats who are waiting to be adopted out to families. "The cats have it very nice," Hammer said. "It's not like being in their own home, but it's the best thing to it."

According to Hammer, the cats are not in crates, but instead are housed in rooms at the shelter. Four or five cats, usually members of the same litter, share

a room. Caretakers clean the cats' rooms every day, including changing litter and blankets, and mopping the floors. Volunteers that the shelter refers to as "socializers" also come in to play with the cats.

Hammer said that occasionally, animals will be dropped off at the Humane Society of Fairfax County with no note.

"One Sunday morning a few years ago, someone left a tiny dog on the porch," Hammer said. "I found him, and took him to the vet as we always do. My daughter had been looking for a small dog, and she ended up adopting that one."

Hammer said that drop-offs don't happen often. Many of the animals the Humane Society receives are given up when an owner has to move to a nursing home or is not able to keep the animal anymore. But other dogs are rescued, such as one Hammer adopted that had been left tied up outside for a long period of time.

The Humane Society of Fairfax County operates almost entirely on a volunteer basis. Operating a thrift shop in the building next door to its main Fairfax office, its volunteers sort donations, operate cash registers, and wait on customers. With the exception of one paid staff member, the proceeds from thrift shop sales go toward the shelter's operating costs.

The Humane Society also offers a pet food pantry as a service to the community.

"People who are in need of assistance and are unable to buy food for their pets can come here and get free pet food," said Hammer. She said that most of the people who come to the pet food pantry for help are residents of Fairfax County, but that sometimes people come from a little farther away. Hammer also said that most of the food is donated to the pantry by Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts who organize pet food drives as a service project.



Grace Hecker, age 14, just finished 8th grade at Carl Sandburg and is heading to West Potomac High School in the Fall. Her horse is named Hans Solo and he is an 8-year-old "Pony of the Americas" breed. Here, Grace and Solo are competing in the Virginia Region Pony Club Show Jumping Championship in May 2014, where they qualified to compete in the U.S. Pony Club national championships in Lexington, Ky. She loves her horse and he is also very attached to her. We have had him for about 18 months. His mom died while giving birth to him and he was bottle-fed by humans, so he acts like a (very large) dog.

— KAREN HECKER

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Lizzie and Yola, the Life Saving Labs

BY WILLIAM AND MEG CLONTZ

About eight years ago, a very special dog came into our lives — and the lives of many others. We signed up with Guiding Eyes for the Blind to be Puppy Raisers.

Our task was to spend a year with a puppy, providing socialization, some basic training, and preparing the dog to go on to advanced training before joining a blind person to be a life team. It's difficult to think about having a dog in your life for a year and then giving her up, but this was important work that could change someone's life, and the program was really well done, so off we went.

Elizabeth, a beautiful black Labrador retriever, was soon a part of our household. Blind people came to talk to our class on several occasions, emphasizing what a powerful service this was for them.

About three-fourths of the way through our scheduled time together, Elizabeth had a third recurrence of an ear infection, which was a minor problem, but it took her out of the program, as guide dogs cannot have any lingering medical issues. We were offered the opportunity to keep Elizabeth as a pet.



Partners in service Lizzie (left) and Yola.

We accepted with delight and Lizzie, as she had become known to us, became a permanent part of our family. Today, she pretty well rules the roost around here.

Our time with Lizzie began with the idea of service and so we looked for other ways she could serve. She is pretty large as Labs go and was a bit too rambunctious as a youngster to be a hospital visitation dog.

Fortunately, someone told us about the dog blood donation program — we found Lizzie's service opportunity.

Like most people, we had never heard of dog blood donation, but we learned that there is more than one type of dog blood and a blood supply is needed for surgeries, just as for people.

In some places, dogs are raised just to be blood donors, a grim sounding life, and so the Blue Ridge Veterinary Blood Bank, a wonderful organization that runs its programs on the strength of volunteers and donations, began a voluntary blood donation program. We signed up with Lizzie.

For about seven years, Lizzie and her good friend Yola (a yellow lab who also had a career change from the guide dog route) would go to the Old Towne Pet Resort in

Springfield about every six weeks to donate. They loved it!

Upon arrival, they were warmly greeted by Dr. Valery Latchesorce and Veterinary Specialist Chris Old, who played with them a bit, then settled in with Chris who would hold them (literally spoon with them on a table), while the veterinarian constantly fed them peanut butter as a quick and painless blood draw was completed.

If you know Labs, you know the combination of constant attention and food was irresistible. Both dogs went into happy fits whenever we pulled into that parking area.

Lizzie and Yola both celebrated their eighth birthdays in June, which means they have retired from the donor program. During their time of service, Lizzie and Yola each helped over 50 dogs by providing blood for surgeries. It was a great run and we are all glad to have participated.

If you would like to know more about these fine organizations and investigate some of the many ways you might be able to contribute, check out The Blue Ridge Veterinary Blood Bank at www.brbbb.com and Guiding Eyes for the Blind at www.guidingeyes.org.

William and Meg Clontz live in Alexandria.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Sharon Bulova with her cats: "Animals add so much to your life!"

Becoming Best Friends

Frodo and Sam have become best friends — sort of. My husband and I adopted Frodo from Home Alone Cat Rescue several years ago. He is part Maine Coon and part American Bobtail, with a funny short tail. He may have been mistreated by a previous owner because he is afraid of everything, especially ceiling fans. He quickly became comfortable in our home as an "only cat."

We adopted "Sam" in September of 2012. She was an adorable tabby kitten, part of a feral litter living outside of a restaurant in Washington D.C. Lee District School Board Member Tammy Kaufax and her two high school aged kids, Halle and Matthew, were fostering the litter as part of a school project. Tammy showed me a photo of the kittens in August of 2012 during the Springfield Bridge Walk and I fell in love with the smallest kitten with tiger markings. As soon as Sam had gained enough weight to be adopted we brought her home as a companion for Frodo.

It took a few weeks for the two cats to get used to each other, but now they play together and chase each other around all the time. They are so cute together, especially when Sam hides behind the bedroom door and ambushes Frodo when he walks into the room. Animals add so much to your life!

— SHARON BULOVA, CHAIRMAN,
FAIRFAX COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

New Approach to Adoptions

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.

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.

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.