Cats: They’re everywhere. Curled up happily in homes, dodging cars on the streets, eking out an existence in managed feral colonies, and filling up shelters around the country. Even in areas where adoptable dogs fly out the doors of animal shelters—and in some cases, rarely enter them—cat numbers are still a challenge for people trying to figure out how to reduce their overpopulation and the resulting suffering and euthanasia.

Two recent studies examined issues related to the survival of cats, in the regular world and in shelters. One group of researchers looked at the methods used by shelters and rescues to distinguish feral cats from frightened cats; the other sought to test how many among a group of owned cats could successfully and safely wear collars for six months.

Both studies are worth reading in their entirety, especially by those working on feline issues. Their findings are illuminating, and the results from the first survey—which indicate a vast disparity in the methods used to separate feral cats from those who are simply freaked-out—emphasize the need for education on the second. Persuading more cat owners to collar and tag their kitties has the potential to reduce the number of cats who end up being treated as ferals due to fearfulness and lack of identification.

In “A survey of the methods used in shelter and rescue programs to identify feral and frightened pet cats,” (Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery, Vol. 12, No. 8) researchers Margaret Slater et. al write that the way an animal shelter handles an incoming cat depends largely on how the cat is catego-
ized—the outcomes can be vastly different depending on whether shelter staff believe the animal to be a frightened stray or a truly feral cat. “Cats must generally be sheltered for a minimum holding period to permit the owner to reclaim … However, in some circumstances, there is no legal requirement to hold cats who are thought to be feral and it is the policy of many shelters to euthanise cats deemed to be feral,” the authors write.

To examine the common approaches for making these determinations, the researchers surveyed a range of animal welfare organizations. They got responses from 555 respondents in 44 states, 11 from Canada, and a smattering from other regions of the world. The most common types of programs were nonprofit “brick-and-mortar” shelters, trap-neuter-return (TNR) organizations, and animal control agencies.

Overall, though assorted behavioral assessments were likely to be conducted, “some programs simply used the criterion that if a cat arrived in a trap it was considered to be feral, without any behavioral assessment.” What’s more, 85 percent of respondents said their group had no written guidelines for how feral vs. frightened determinations should be made. And a substantial number of groups euthanized cats as soon as they were categorized as feral—even though 288 respondents (more than half) noted that they had had cases where a cat first thought to be feral was later determined not to be.

On the brighter side, 66 percent said that TNR was at least sometimes an option for cats believed to be feral. “Minimum holding times were highly varied, with 1-3 days common among all organizations and most common for animal control programs,” the researchers write. “A surprisingly high number of other groups … were able to hold cats at least 7 days.”

Noting the high number of respondents to the survey, the researchers write that they believe there is “a wide audience for a still-to-be-developed valid and easily applied tool to determine if a cat is or is not feral.”

This mixed bag of findings makes the results from the second study—Linda K. Lord et. al’s long-awaited examination of cat collar-and-chipping—all the more relevant.

In “Evaluation of collars and microchips for visual and permanent identification of pet cats” (Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association, Vol. 237, No. 4), researchers aimed to find out what percentage of pet cats would still have functioning microchips and be wearing collars after six months.

Of cats entering shelters with an unknown ownership status, less than 2 percent are reunited with their owners compared with 15-19 percent of lost dogs, the researchers note, pointing out that one reason for this disparity may be that many owners don’t give their cats any form of identification. They cite an earlier survey conducted in Ohio, in which only 17 percent of cat owners surveyed said they use some sort of visual ID, and only 3 percent use microchips. Beyond the various reasons those owners provided for their behavior, “A general dogma apparently exists among cat owners and veterinarians that cats cannot wear collars or will be injured by them,” the authors write.

For this study, a total of 538 cats belonging to 338 owners were assigned to wear one of three different types of collar—a plastic buckle collar, a breakaway plastic buckle collar, or an elastic stretch safety collar. All participating cats were microchipped for the test (cats who had previously implanted chips were excluded from the study). Owners answered questions about what they expected and about their experiences at the beginning and end of the six-month study.

The outcome: Nearly 73 percent of cats were able to wear their collars for the entire six-month period. Owners’ willingness to replace a collar, as well as their initial expectations of how well their cat would fare at retaining/wearing it, were both predictive of cats’ success; those owners who felt more positively about their cats wearing collars were more likely to have cats who succeeded in wearing them longer. Of the 478 cats who were scanned for chips at the end of the study, 477 had chips that were still functional.

“Results of the study reported here suggested that approximately three-fourths of cats could successfully wear a collar,” the authors write. Most microchips remained functional, and few had migrated from their original implantation site.

In conclusion, they write, “We believe that both visual and permanent identification are essential components of a comprehensive preventive medical plan for cats. … Veterinarians can play a life-saving role in increasing recovery through education and implementation of wellness protocols that include visual and permanent identification of cats.”

Animal Sheltering Online
Your magazine isn’t just in print—it’s on the Web, too. Check out this issue’s online extras.

■ Go to animalsheltering.org/ mouthpieces to download a poster on how shelter visitors can help keep the animals healthy.

■ To read more responses from readers to our Coffee Break question for this issue, go to animalsheltering.org/publications/magazine/coffee_break.

■ To watch video of the free shot clinic and spay/neuter awareness event in North Carolina, go to humanesociety.org/churchclinics.

■ To watch video of one pit bull’s journey through the Humane Society of Missouri’s post-dogfighting-raid temporary shelter, go to humanesociety.org/faceofdogfighting.

■ To apply to the Emergency Services Placement Partner program (ESPP), an initiative of The Humane Society of the United States, go to animalsheltering.org/espp.

■ Read one volunteer’s story of a rescue effort that changed her life—and united her with a dog she believes was meant to be her companion. Go to animalsheltering.org/sweet_dream.
Making the Mean Streets a Little Kinder

In Portland, an animal welfare group keeps people in mind

His name is Cubby, and he’s here because of a mole. It’s likely harmless, that small growth on the leg of this 13-year-old Pomeranian-spitz mix. Nevertheless, his human is worried.

Of course it doesn’t take much to worry Lawrence C. (last name withheld). “I have a problem with my temper,” says Lawrence, a 330-pound giant of a man with a booming voice and a huge presence. “I used to punch people when they said ‘Hi.’ With Cubby, I don’t lose my temper as much. He knows what I need.”

Cubby and Lawrence are first in line for this month’s free veterinary clinic sponsored by the Portland Animal Welfare (PAW) Team. Being first took some doing. The pair arrived at 6 a.m., six hours before the clinic opened. The line behind them, now stretching around the block, includes hundreds of animals and their human companions waiting to get in the door.

Yvette Maxwell is 50. Her one-eyed cat, Herman, is maybe 3. Yvette found him in the street, badly injured. He had a microchip that led nowhere. “He was just dumped,” she says. Looking up from beneath her baseball cap, Yvette whispers behind her cupped hand, “I just heard someone say, ‘Do you have your food stamps card?’ I’m so embarrassed. But now I’m studying to cut hair.”

The PAW Team was created in the early ’90s to serve Portland’s street people. From the get-go, says executive director Wendy Kohn, its mission raised some hackles. “How can the homeless even think of having animals?” she says naysayers complained. “They can’t take care of themselves!” On seeing a panhandler with an animal companion, they’d say, “That poor dog must be starving!”

Wrong, says Kohn, after years of observation. “Street people will willingly go without their own food in order to feed their pets.”

Lawrence C., for example, fears for his sanity without his beloved Cubby. His animal keeps him balanced and alive.

“People who are on the streets obviously made mistakes or suffered a series of calamities in their lives,” says Kohn. “And whether [they’re] incarcerated, divorced, without a job or on drugs, their animal is the only creature in their lives that doesn’t judge, doesn’t care.”

Advocacy for street people and their four-legged families has grown immeasurably since the PAW Team first opened for business. Today, the scope of its mission has changed as well, and its client base has expanded.

“Since 2008, more middle-class people have been showing up at our clinics,” says Mary Blankevoort, D.V.M., a member of the PAW Team board. “I’ve even seen a few people who used to be in my private practice. Now they’re lining up to get in here.”

Standing in a sidewalk line, just one of hundreds in need, is a far cry from waiting in the clean and quiet space of a private clinic. But the quality of care at a PAW Team clinic is just as singular, as a rotating team of veterinarians and vet techs focuses on individual animals despite all the goings-on in this supermarket-like space. On offer is a smorgasbord of services: medical exams, vaccines, county licensing, flea treatment, and for the hopelessly matted, grooming.

The PAW Team first took to the streets with MASH-style tents and offered clinics quarterly. Today, it holds clinics the first Sunday of every month. In the past, its volunteer staff might have seen 60 animals in a day. It now averages 12 dozen.
This past October, the clinic ministered to a staggering 170 animals. Volunteer veterinarians treated everything from Cubby’s harmless tumor to the conjunctivitis of a one-eyed cat named Herman. “One hundred and seventy animals is not a record we want to repeat!” says Kohn. “We intended to cap the number at 150, but our incredible volunteers stayed late. Still, it’s just too hard on them.”

Portland, Ore., is a wildly animal-crazed city. In fact, it was recently voted the most pet-friendly city in the U.S. on the website livability.com. That could help explain why the PAW Team is flush with volunteers, typically 100 kind civilians and 10 veterinarians, among them oncologists and doctors from the state health department and Oregon Humane Society.

Yet even this zone of pet-friendliness has been affected by the recession. Funding is tight. A PAW Team clinic costs an estimated $6,000, and the organization chicken-scratches for the cash.

Kohn recites its litany of financial support. “Individuals, tabling at local events, e-mail solicitations, and word-of-mouth. Small grants, fundraisers by animal-related businesses, and at every clinic, a donations jar.”

The PAW Team’s biggest cash layout is for flea treatments and vaccines. Right now, through the largess of a local business, the team pays only utilities for its desirable Portland location. The rent’s free. This means the PAW Team is enjoying the extraordinary luxury of staying put: No more schlepping every clip board, blanket, and chair to a revolving carousel of one-day events. But no one knows how long the largess will last.

The scene inside today’s clinic feels a lot like a school fair, as people and animals flow from booth to booth sampling the medical wares. Ten triage-like units staffed by vets and techs are hives of activity as clients move from table to table. Despite what board member Marilee Muzatko describes as “little eddies of chaos,” the line appears to move with impressive efficiency and surprising calm.

And then there’s the paperwork trail: The PAW Team’s client files are kept in a database going back an astonishing 10 years. The organization has an arsenal of means to stay abreast of its clients—among them, a blonde sleuth in capri pants and sneakers who’s always on the prowl.

Her name is Robyn Luchs. Her nametag reads “Spay and Neuter Goddess.” Like many a deity, however, she has another, fiercer side. “If someone says ‘No’ to me when I ask, ‘Are you planning to have your animal fixed?’ I become the Spay and Neuter …”—well, let’s just say it rhymes with witch.

Case in point: Luchs has been tipped off that a PAW client with a beautiful brindle pit is a breeder. She asks the woman if it’s true. Confirmed.

“You breed them, and I get to see the creation of animal housing adjacent to or within homeless shelters, enabling the homeless to remain with, or near, their best friends.

Blankevoort has an even broader view of the service her organization provides. “We’re involved in community health,” she says. “We offer parasite control and prevent communicable diseases, like rabies. If the animals are healthier, their people are healthier. Which means the city and the community are healthier, too.”
In the Internet age, it’s easier than ever to be nasty. When someone’s got a gripe, they can post it online—anonimously, with little regard to whether it’s fair, accurate, or personally abusive.

It’s a problem across the Web, but it’s had particular ramifications in the animal welfare community, where nonstop attacks can make life miserable and drive people out of the field.

“Shelters are, more than ever, under attack for the decisions they make, or the decisions they don’t make, or their philosophies, and the attacks that are being launched against them are becoming much more sophisticated and much more coordinated,” says Inga Fricke, director of sheltering initiatives for The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS).

Rewarding Partnerships for Pet Adoptions

Each year, PetSmart Charities works with Adoption Partners to find loving homes for more than 400,000 pets. Partner benefits include monetary rewards for every adoption that originates in a PetSmart Store, and increased rewards during four nationally advertised adoption weekends.

Visit www.petsmartcharities.org/programs/adoption.php to learn how you can partner with us.
People being angry about shelter policies is hardly new; Fricke recalls hearing that, decades ago, threats prompted the founders of her first shelter to sleep with shotguns. But Fricke believes that current differences in sheltering philosophies—particularly over the “no-kill” question—have mobilized a vocal minority to take forceful action, from lawsuits to bomb threats. And with the advent of Facebook and other social networking sites, she adds, “People who are unhappy can link up very easily with other people who are unhappy, and they tend to feed on each other and really escalate.”

In an effort to cool down the overheated rhetoric and promote more respectful behavior, leaders in The HSUS’s Companion Animals department last year developed a three-paragraph civility pledge, “Humane Discourse and Conduct Within Animal Welfare.” The pledge calls for its signers to “reject and condemn verbal abuse, threats, and acts of violence directed against animal welfare personnel.”

**Posted Nov. 7 on The HSUS’s animalsheltering.org,** the pledge within weeks had been signed by nearly 200 individuals and about 100 organizations, from national advocacy groups like the ASPCA to local animal control agencies and rescue groups. The pledge’s drafters hope it helps thwart abusive language and behavior by promoting a more civil standard. The pledge doesn’t aim to stop anyone from speaking out against animal abuses or cruelty, Fricke says. “It’s just essentially a reminder to everyone that we are all people in the business of protecting animals, and we can’t get down to business if we’re fighting each other.”

Ideally, she adds, the pledge will gather so many signatures that it can’t be ignored, and people will wonder why an organization would refuse to agree to engage in civil conduct.

Promoting more reasonable discourse appears to be a trend in the animal welfare community. A recent Society of Animal Welfare Administrators (SAWA) conference featured a crisis management presentation (“What to Do When Bad Things Happen to Dedicated People”) that included a guide to surviving social media attacks. The ASPCA has launched a website (noharmnokill.com) that stresses community cooperation as a key to saving animals’ lives.

Karel Minor, executive director of the Humane Society of Berks County in Pennsylvania, says the humane discourse pledge is necessary in light of the personal attacks plaguing the animal welfare movement and the “bigger megaphone” of modern communications. “We’re in a very serious business—it is literally life and death what we do—but that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t take a deep breath occasionally, and find a less offensive way to say the sometimes very serious and sometimes pointed things we have to say.”

To view the pledge, go to animalsheltering.org/pledge.
The local news media called her a hero, but animal control officer Aimee Wesley says she was just being neighborly.

On the afternoon of Sept. 21, Wesley, who was four months pregnant, had gone home for lunch at Fairway Park Apartments in the northern Kentucky town of Independence. When she headed back outside to get in her animal control truck, she looked at the apartment building 30 feet in front of hers and saw smoke coming from the top. A second-floor balcony had caught fire, and the blaze had spread to the third floor.

Someone had already called 911, so the fire department was on its way. Wesley and her husband, who was the on-call maintenance man for the apartment complex, became the first rescuers to enter the building. They walked through hallways that were filling with smoke, knocking on doors to get the people out.

Animal control officer Aimee Wesley, second from left, watches the blaze and confers with the fire chief during a September fire at an apartment complex in Independence, Ky. Wesley, four months pregnant at the time, alerted residents to the fire and retrieved 13 of their pets.
Firefighters arrived to douse the blaze, and the residents gathered in the parking lot were “just standing there kind of in awe,” Wesley recalls.

Concerned about the safety of their pets, Wesley’s neighbors turned to her. Everyone at the complex knows her by name and knows her occupation, she explains, “so they sought me out in the crowd to tell me that their animals were still inside. ... I was the only person that they could say, ‘Please go get my cat.’”

It took an hour or so before Wesley, accompanied by firefighters, could reenter the building and search for people’s pets. With the help of fellow Kenton County ACO Jimmy Boling, she retrieved 13 of them: six cats, two dogs, a snake, a lizard, a goldfish, a lovebird, and a rabbit. “It was quite the menagerie,” she says.

The fire produced some striking rescue stories. The snake’s tank fell from the third floor to the second floor as the fire raged, but he made it out unharmed, Wesley marvels. One pregnant tenant initially fled her second-floor apartment, unable to find her cat or lift her lizard’s cage— but both were eventually rescued.

The thought that she perhaps shouldn’t be running around a burning building while pregnant “didn’t really occur to me,” Wesley says. Her pregnancy wasn’t that far along, her doctor hadn’t restricted her activities, and she didn’t breathe smoke for an excessive amount of time. Afterward she called her doctor, who said she and the baby should be fine.

In the chaos of the firefighting responses and the evacuation, if Wesley couldn’t immediately find an owner, she crated the animal, and her husband took the crates to their apartment, Wesley explains. The couple at one point had five crates, but all the owners were found by around 9:30 that night.

As far as Wesley knows, the only animals who failed to survive the fire were two parakeets on the third floor. Twenty-two families were burned out of their homes, but there were no reported injuries among the residents.

The fire and the efforts to extinguish it left the surviving animals frightened and soggy. “Every animal that we got out of there, we basically had to hunt them down,” Boling says, explaining that the scared pets were hiding under couches and beds.

Wesley adds, “Most of the animals that I brought out were soaking, sopping wet from the amount of water that [firefighters] were pumping into the third floor.”

For many tenants, their animals were “really the only thing that they wanted” to recover from the fire, Wesley says. As an owner of three dogs, Wesley says she understands that attitude; animals, after all, can’t be replaced.

“One apartment, they had three cats, and when we brought them out, it was kind of overwhelming for [the tenants], with the damage that was done, knowing that their animals were still alive and actually in good health,” Boling recalls. “They were overjoyed.”

Some local news reports focused on Wesley’s rescue efforts, turning her into a reluctant hero. She recalls with a laugh that one local newscaster dubbed her “Wonder Woman.”

“I didn’t really welcome any of the media attention,” she says. Wesley spoke to reporters off-camera to correct the initial reports that all the animals had died, and to provide updates on when tenants could retrieve their belongings. “These are people that I know. It wasn’t like I was driving past and these were complete strangers. It was more personal. Even though I was there in an official capacity, it was personal for me.”

Wesley and her husband have since moved out of the apartment complex, but they’re likely to remember the anniversary of the fire, which occurred on her husband’s birthday. “We had to cancel our dinner reservations,” she says, laughing.
Travels with Bernie

Foster-and-rescue program’s transport model gives thousands of dogs a second chance

In 2009, A Place to Bark Animal Rescue transported more than 600 dogs from rural animal control shelters in Tennessee to the Anti-Cruelty Society in Chicago for adoption. In 2010, the rescue started transporting pets to a second partnering shelter, and that number increased to more than 700 dogs. In the past five years, the rescue has fostered and placed more than 2,500 pets.

These figures are remarkable when you consider that A Place to Bark, based in Portland, Tenn., is made up of Bernadette “Bernie” Berlin, who founded the rescue in 2001; two part-time employees who help her care for the dogs in a facility at her home; and a friend of Berlin’s who helps her transport the pets twice a month in a rented cargo van.

Berlin shoulders much of the responsibility herself—with some moral and logistical support from her enormous social network. “I’ve got almost 27,000 followers on Twitter. I have more than 4,000 friends on Facebook, with another 1,000 waiting for me to approve them,” she says. Berlin’s constantly posting videos to YouTube, blogging, or updating her website, and she says that social networking has been her greatest resource. “Reaching out to animal lovers in other parts of the country, and receiving help when needed most, has made it possible to continue saving as many animals in need [as I can],” Berlin says. “I have a huge reach, via the Internet.”

She networks offline, too, building relationships with The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), the ASPCA, Best Friends Animal Society, and animal control officers across Tennessee. She’s often called on to take animals seized from cruelty cases, puppy mill raids, and hoarding situations.

“Bernie has been a really great friend to HSUS. She’s one of the top three go-to people for me in the state. Any time we need assistance with placement of animals … she’s
always there to help,” says HSUS Tennessee state director Leighann McCollum.

Berlin says she never expected the volume she’s handling. “I’m constantly going. If a dog breaks with parvo, I’m [working] around the clock with those dogs,” she says.

When Berlin’s not at animal control shelters pulling dogs, she’s caring for them at her facility—the rescue has 10,000 square feet of outdoor kenneling, plus a 2,000-square-foot outbuilding, all on her 20 acres—or transporting them to Chicago or a Florida partnering shelter. She routinely visits rural animal control shelters, mostly in middle Tennessee, where she pulls dogs who she thinks are highly adoptable. She takes them back to her facility, where they get full vet care, vaccinations, time to settle in (which also serves as a quarantine period), socialization, and rehabilitation.

Then, about twice a month, Berlin and her friend Glenda Campbell load a cargo van with anywhere from 25 to nearly 60 dogs in stacked carriers, and drive the eight to nine hours to Chicago, or about 16 hours to the Peggy Adams Animal Rescue League of the Palm Beaches in West Palm Beach, Fla. For six years, Berlin did all the driving herself; more recently, she has paid Campbell to help her on the transports.

As soon as the pets arrive at the two partnering shelters, they receive physical exams, are spayed or neutered, and are put on the adoption floor. Most of them get adopted within five to seven days, according to Berlin. She takes back those dogs who don’t get adopted within two weeks, or who don’t do well in the shelter for some reason, and continues to work with them.

“Over the course of time, we’ve learned to trust Bernie, and when she calls us and tells us she’s found some remarkably adoptable dogs, we just say ‘OK,’ because we know enough to accept her at her word,” says the Anti-Cruelty Society’s vice president of operations, David Dinger. “What makes Bernie special is she’s not just pulling these animals out, and running them up to the big city. She takes the time and puts in the energy and resources to provide some basic care for these animals before they get transported into an urban shelter setting.”

In Chicago, puppies are in great demand, and people who are adamant about getting a puppy will go to a pet store if a shelter doesn’t have any, according to Dinger. The puppies and young dogs Berlin transports to the Anti-Cruelty Society bring people into the shelter, and offer exposure to adult animals awaiting adoption. The shelter, he notes, continues to take transfers of pets from animal control and local humane societies.

Berlin has been transporting animals to the Chicago shelter for about five years. But she just did her first transport of dogs to the Florida shelter in spring 2010, followed by a second transport last November. “We’ve had great success in finding those dogs homes quickly, and so that’s led to expanding our relationship [with Berlin],” says David Miller, executive director/CEO of Peggy Adams.

Funding remains the nonprofit rescue’s biggest challenge. Because it’s a shelter-to-shelter program, A Place to Bark doesn’t receive adoption fees, so it has to rely on private donations of funds, food, and other supplies. “Every day is a challenge to keep our doors open,” Berlin says.

But she has no plans to quit, though the job is draining, and there’s an endless supply of pets in need. “Saving these helpless animals, and doing whatever it takes to get them into loving homes—that’s the reward. They save me as much as I save them,” Berlin says.

To learn more about A Place to Bark Animal Rescue, visit aplacetobark.com.
Creating a Career Ladder Through Certification

BY HAROLD DATES, CAWA

For years, many devoted managers in animal welfare have been committed to the field and to their work, but have had no clear means of professional advancement. What does a career ladder look like in animal sheltering?

In 2002, industry leader members of the Society of Animal Welfare Administrators (SAWA) embarked on an effort to make that clearer, and to provide a means to measure the knowledge and skills of shelter professionals. They looked into the future and saw the possibility of respected, widespread, highly educated professionals working together to save more animals’ lives. Volunteers worked with an expert to design a leadership development program unique to animal welfare, care, and control: the Certified Animal Welfare Administrator (CAWA) accreditation program.

Implemented in 2004, the accreditation program allows qualified professionals (both SAWA and non-SAWA members) to test themselves by meeting rigorous standards set by peer professionals. One must pass a challenging exam to achieve the CAWA designation. Those who have the knowledge to pass the test exhibit advanced skills in leadership, administration, management, personnel supervision, public relations, fundraising, animal care and treatment, and reasoning.

If you’re looking toward a long career in animal welfare, you should know that the boards of directors of humane organizations and the human resources departments of animal control agencies already see the value of hiring a chief executive officer/executive director who has achieved the CAWA designation. They want a leader with well-rounded experience and unique animal welfare knowledge to support their mission and long-term growth. They know that the community will benefit from the leadership of an executive whose certification communicates expertise: Donors understand the commitment of the organization to spend funds wisely, and staff gain a leader and mentor with the highest competence.

In addition, industry partners (such as pet nutrition, pet health, administrative software, human resources, and development companies) have taken notice of the certification program and support our efforts to continually professionalize the industry. They see peers, with quality staff, working together in collaboration and supporting the mission to improve lives of the animals we serve.

Currently the CAWA exam is given once a year in two geographic locations. Those studying for the exam can get support from SAWA in a number of ways:

A sample test is available, with concepts equivalent to the actual exam.

Applicants are directed to a recommended reading list, and the cost of some reading materials is paid by SAWA.

Applicants network on a CAWA-only list-serv, supported by CAWA mentors.

Applicants can join a CAWA study group to share notes, write sample questions, and network.

Candidates must have a minimum of three years experience as a CEO (or management-level position reporting directly to the CEO, chief operating officer, director of operations, or an equivalent position) in an animal sheltering agency. Two years of management experience as CEO (or senior management position) of a nonprofit or public agency in another field can substitute for part of the required experience.

Learn more about this unmatched opportunity at sawanetwork.org. If you have questions, please e-mail admin@SAWAnetwork.org. If your organization is seeking a CEO/executive director, we encourage you to request “CAWA Preferred” on your job posting.

Harold Dates is president & CEO of SPCA Cincinnati and Certification Committee Chair of the Society of Animal Welfare Administrators (SAWA).

SAWA 2011 Conference Schedule

- Management Conference, Charlotte, N.C., June 8-10
- Annual Conference, San Francisco, Calif., Nov. 13-15
Julie Brinker keeps a few mementos to remind her of some of the special animals she has worked with as staff veterinarian at the Humane Society of Missouri. There’s a picture of Daisy, a dog she nursed back to health from repeated bouts of illness, who was later adopted. A photo of two puppies asleep in a water bowl. An ID tag from Handsome, a big, yellow pit bull who was too aggressive to be placed. And another tag, stamped “153”—representing all the puppies born during a span of time at the shelter, who would never have to experience dogfighting.

“That’s on my keychain,” she says.

Brinker met and cared for each of these animals over a period of seven months, when the Humane Society of Missouri took on a task far greater than its usual already-full plate of running three animal shelters. From July 2009 until February 2010, the organization ran a temporary shelter for 407 pit bull terriers and pit bull mixes—and 153 puppies born after the dogs’ arrival.

The dogs were rescued in 2009 as part of a larger operation when federal, state, and county law enforcement agencies made arrests and seized dogs in eight states—the largest one-day series of federal dogfighting raids in U.S. history. The Humane Society of the United States assisted authorities in this effort.

All of the dogs rescued from the 22 sites in Missouri and Illinois were transported to a 25,000-square-foot temporary shelter that the Humane Society of Missouri rented and prepared for the dogs in the weeks preceding the raids. That site—which came to be known as “Pit Bull Palace”—served as their home, as 120 shelter staff and more than 300 volunteers from 14 states and Canada cycled through, healing their wounds, treating their illnesses, and finding homes for as many as possible.

Dealing with a sudden influx of sick, injured, and unsocialized dogs is nothing new for the organization. Based in a state with an estimated 3,000 puppy mills, the shelter is often asked to take in large numbers of dogs—but little could have adequately prepared staff and volunteers for an effort of this magnitude.

“When you think of [so many] fighting pit bulls in a temporary shelter ... you look at that, and you say, ‘It shouldn’t have been possible. That’s crazy,’” says Debbie Hill, vice president of operations for the Humane Society of Missouri, who led the sheltering team. “But, you know, they did it, and they did it well.”

It’s especially impressive given that—due to the secret nature of the operation—only a small number of staff knew about the impending raids, the temporary shelter had to be readied as discreetly as possible, and a maximum of only 250-300 dogs was expected.

“It’s pretty common for us to bring in a couple hundred dogs from hoarders or puppy mills. But 400 dogs that want to eat each other, on top of our normal population, in a facility that we set up literally the week before ...” says Brinker, who was in charge of medical care at the temporary site.

Most shelter staff had no idea about the raids or the shelter being prepared. Rumor
was that the site would house dogs from a puppy mill raid. “As we gathered, waiting for the first dogs to come off the trucks, they were told, ‘It’s pit bulls. It’s dogfighting. They are going to want to eat each other. Here are the new rules,’” Brinker says.

Staff made every effort to minimize visual contact among the dogs, most of whom had been trained to be dog-aggressive. And runs had to be arranged so that if a dog got loose, he couldn’t get to another dog. Staff bought up a huge supply of heavy-gauge wire fencing and lengths of landscape fabric to create secure runs that also blocked the dogs from easily seeing each other. Runs were set up in aisles, with gates at each end.

Staff and volunteers soon discovered that the dogs, many of whom would snarl and lunge at each other, were extremely friendly toward people. “It was amazing that these dogs that had been marketed by their previous owners as vicious, when we took them out of their kennels, they sat on our laps, and licked us,” says Laura Renner, the shelter’s volunteer manager.

Medical care was a huge, ongoing challenge. Upon intake, veterinarians had to examine all the dogs, noting their condition, injuries, and illnesses, then begin treating them. They received vaccinations, were tested for heartworms, were dewormed, had their nails clipped and their ears cleaned, and other routine care at admission.

Then the real work began. Many of the dogs were in dire condition, either terribly sick, suffering ghastly wounds, or both. “We had a dog come in with a body condition score of one. The next step down is dead,” Brinker says. “We had a dog come in who was literally ripped to shreds—down to the cartilage on his nose—who was smiling at us and wagging his tail and wanting to kiss you, and he stank to high heaven because his wounds were so infected.”

(The dog Brinker refers to, a pit bull whom the staff named Stallone, is the subject of an HSUS video, “The Face of Dogfighting.” View it at humane society.org/faceofdogfighting.

The outpouring of support astounded staff. Volunteers called from shelters and rescue groups around the country, offering help. “We had people who would come multiple times. It’s almost like sometimes you couldn’t get them to go home. People would take their vacations and come volunteer with us, because it meant that much to them to help those animals,” Hill says.

The work was physically, mentally, and emotionally draining—and expensive. Because the FBI was involved, the federal government reimbursed the shelter for some of the costs incurred, but the rest—hundreds of thousands of dollars—came from the shelter’s coffers. But she has no regrets that the shelter participated. “You couldn’t turn your back on them, you just couldn’t. You had to be there for them.”

The operation was remarkably successful. Staff and volunteers were able to place far more of them than they’d hoped. “Initially, we were told to expect 5 percent of those dogs, maybe 10 percent, might be able to find new homes. We were successful in placing over 250 of them,” says Linda Campbell, director of shelter pet training, who supervised behavioral evaluations for all the dogs. (The others were determined to be either too sick, too injured, or too dog-aggressive to be adopted out, and were euthanized.)

On July 10, 2010, the shelter hosted the “Missouri 500 Reunion,” a memorial tribute to celebrate the effort’s accomplishments, thank staff and volunteers who participated, and remember the dogs who didn’t make it. Some of the people who’d adopted dogs and puppies from the raid brought them back to the event. “It was really remarkable to see how good they were doing, and to have in this one area these [formerly] vicious fighting dogs that didn’t get into fights,” Renner says.

It wasn’t just the dogs who passed through the temporary shelter who were marked by the intense experience. It left a deep impression on the rescuers and the caregivers, too. “I heard one of our staff say there was her life before the rescue, and there was her life after it, and I would have to agree with that. It certainly changes your perspective on how resilient animals can be, even when they come from terrible, horrible places,” Renner says. “And also how dedicated people can be.”
Churches Go to the Dogs (And Cats)

Animal advocates partner with two congregations to provide veterinary care to a North Carolina community

BY JIM BAKER

When Stephen Owen thinks about his family’s dog, it stirs thoughts of his faith.

“I truly believe pets are a gift from God. We recently bought a chocolate Lab, and just the smile it brings to my kids’ faces when they see him … It’s obvious to me that pets are special to people, because God gave them to us, and it’s our duty to protect and to help what God gives us, to be good stewards,” he says.

The connection he makes might come as a surprise to some, but Owen—associate pastor of Shallow Well Church, a United Church of Christ congregation in Sanford, N.C.—thinks it makes perfect sense.

His experience of the human-animal bond as a relationship with sacred underpinnings captures the spirit of an event held last October in Lee County, N.C. Hundreds of people turned out for a free shot clinic and spay/neuter awareness effort jointly hosted by Shallow Well Church and Jonesboro Heights Baptist Church, also in Sanford. The event was coordinated by Kim Alboum, North Carolina state director for The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS); Amanda Arrington, manager of spay/neuter initiatives for The HSUS; and Christine Gutleben, director of the organization’s Faith Outreach program.

It’s a model that Gutleben has used elsewhere in the country—New Orleans, for instance—with great success. The idea is to encourage pastors and their congregations to think about animals in the context of faith, to get them to think broadly about stewardship and our responsibility toward all of God’s creatures—including pets.

Many shelters might study the approach: If you want to reach people, go where they are rather than waiting for them to come to you. “Working with churches to address these issues is incredibly effective,” says Gutleben. “In many cases, they’re the center of their community, and they provide essential services, especially in underserved communities.” Helping people care for their pets is a natural extension of those services, Gutleben adds.

It didn’t take much work to convince Owen, and the Rev. Mark Gaskins of Jonesboro Heights Baptist Church, to participate in the vaccine and spay/neuter event. The idea fit right in with the type of ministry that Gaskins and his congregation are already doing. “The low-income population of Lee County is concentrated in a two-mile radius around our church. So what we have done is launched ‘Mission Jonesboro,’ and we’re trying to reach out and serve the community, and through serving the community to embody Christ’s presence, and build relationships that will open doors to share the gospel with people,” Gaskins says.

After Gutleben called Owen to float the idea of an event targeting local pet owners, he suggested including Jonesboro Heights; the two congregations have partnered on projects in the past. Owen and Gaskins met, picked a date, picked a location (a grassy, vacant lot owned by Gaskins’ church), and went from there.

“We’re all aware of the overpopulation of pets, plus, with the state of the economy right now, it’s obvious that people are in need of help … The [HSUS] has a good reputation, so it was a way to reach out to the community with a strong organization, and really do some good,” Owen says.

Once the churches signed on, Alboum reached out to Abbey Lindauer, a board member of Carolina Animal Rescue and Adoption (CARA), a rescue group with its own shelter in Sanford. The group offered to contribute $500 to pay for low-cost spay/neuter vouchers to distribute at the event. The HSUS matched CARA’s contribution, so a total of $1,000 was used to purchase low-cost spay/neuter vouchers from the Spay/Neuter Veterinary Clinic of the Sandhills, a nonprofit practice supported by the Companion Animal Clinic of the Sandhills Foundation, in nearby Vass, N.C.

Alboum also contacted veterinarian Kelli Ferris, an assistant clinical professor at North Carolina State University’s College of Veterinary Medicine who also serves as director of the college’s community/campus partnership program. She offered to contribute all the necessary veterinary supplies and services, as well as the college’s mobile surgery hospital.

A week before the event, Owen used the children’s story hour—which takes place during his church’s worship service—for dual purposes: to publicize the free shot clinic and spay/neuter effort; and to say a few words about the importance of taking care of companion animals. Fliers were handed out to the congregation, and Owen encouraged people to give them to friends and neighbors who might need some help taking care of their pets.

The day of the event, none of the organizers knew quite what to expect. Had they done enough publicity? How many people would turn out?

“Initially when we planned to do this, we had no idea what our participation was going to be like. It was just something that we were going to try because it was a community in need,” Alboum says. But they needn’t have worried: Hundreds of people showed up.
“It was crazy,” says Lindauer. “It was amazing that people waited two and a half hours, with dogs on leashes and cats in carriers, and everybody waited patiently, and was so kind. One woman came with her 12 small-breed dogs in the back of her car.”

Two hundred and eighty-three pets got rabies vaccines, and more than 200 animals received core vaccinations. (Dogs got shots for distemper, parvo, and canine adenovirus; cats got CVR vaccines to prevent against herpesvirus, calicivirus, and panleukopenia.) All $1,000 worth of low-cost and no-cost spay/neuter vouchers were distributed, and the pet owners’ names were added to the waiting list for surgical procedures at the clinic in Vass. Many of them followed up soon afterward. “In fact, we heard from the spay/neuter clinic that they’ve already gotten tons of those appointments done,” says Arrington, who lives in Raleigh, N.C.

The support of the two Sanford congregations was one key to the overall success. “The churches were fabulous,” Lindauer says. They provided activities for children who attended, water and snacks for people and pets alike, and bilingual translators to assist community members who primarily speak Spanish (Lee County has a large Hispanic population). It worked out well for the churches, too. They gave away English- and Spanish-language Bibles, and directors of the children’s choirs and members of the mission groups were on hand to meet participants. “I think people made the connection of the two churches being there to serve the community,” Gaskins says.

Owen was amazed by how many people expressed their appreciation. “There was one in particular—a lady, and she had her son with her. She came to me, and she said, ‘Thank you so much for doing this. We weren’t going to be able to afford the shots they needed this year,’” he says. “But what meant the most to me was the child looked at me, and he said, ‘Thank you so much,’ and just smiled. That made it worth all the hard work.”

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For a while last summer, the Sacramento SPCA in California appeared to be hosting a Chihuahua convention.

“We did have Chihuahuas parked everywhere,” says Rick Johnson, the SPCA’s executive director.

The private, nonprofit Sacramento shelter, which typically houses at least 300 animals, took in an additional 158, including 138 dogs (primarily Chihuahuas, but also some larger dogs such as border collie and Great Pyrenees mix), 12 cats, three rabbits, three rats, and two mice.

Portable wire cages housing multiple dogs were stacked in an open area, says Lesley Kirrene, the organization’s public relations director. Runs were filled with larger dogs and groups of Chihuahuas. The dogs essentially took over an entire building. Though the situation was well-managed, Kirrene says—with staff and volunteers keeping the area clean, and giving the dogs several walks a day—feeding time produced an ear-splitting racket.

Rescuers from The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and Kern County Animal Control had removed the animals in July from substandard conditions at a Chihuahua “rescue” in Tehachapi, Calif., about 320 miles south of the capital city. The SPCA got involved because it was well-positioned to help, with an in-house behaviorist, dog trainers, a knowledgeable staff, dedicated volunteers, and the ability to make room for the newcomers.

The SPCA also has “a phenomenal placement rate for small dogs,” Kirrene says. “We can’t keep them in the shelter.”

The reasons are rooted in geography and culture. Hundreds of miles south in trendy areas of Southern California, Kirrene explains, residents are infatuated with the “pocket dogs” they’ve seen carried around by celebrities like Paris Hilton, and some So Cal shelters are overloaded with small dogs and faced with a client base that’s saturated with them, making local adoptions difficult, Kirrene says.

But in Sacramento and elsewhere in Northern California, the yards and the dogs tend to be larger, and the population of small dogs hasn’t yet hit the saturation point. “Those of us in Northern California think of Southern California as almost a separate state,” Kirrene says. “They’re very different areas population-wise and income-wise and trend- and fad-wise.”

The influx after July’s rescue posed logistical and staffing challenges. The SPCA has three separate buildings: one for new arrivals, one that serves as a sick bay, and one that houses animals ready for adoption. When the dogs from Kern County arrived, the shelter
moved its sick-bay animals to one side of the dog adoption area, shut that off to the public, and converted the regular sick bay into an area for the new arrivals.

The dogs were generally well-fed and in decent medical shape, though most of the Chihuahuas were older and had horrible dental conditions that required attention, Kirrene recalls. But many of the dogs exhibited fear and poor socialization; they had biting issues and were territorial over their food.

The shelter set up a group of staff and volunteers dedicated to the Kern County dogs. “We tried to keep the same couple of staff people with the dogs at all times, and it was amazing the bond that they formed,” Kirrene says. Dogs who initially wouldn’t let anyone near them ended up energetically licking a staff member’s face, tails wagging. Volunteers who walked and socialized the dogs daily played a huge role in getting them ready for adoption, Kirrene adds. By early December, only one of the Kern County dogs was still waiting for a home.

(Thirty of the animals had to be euthanized because of illness or socialization issues, while 101 had been adopted out by the shelter, and 25 were sent to rescue.)

The SPCA’s efforts produced both sad and happy moments. A poorly socialized female border collie mix was initially frightened of Kirrene but eventually warmed up to her. “She not only got used to me, she became, I think, very, very attached”—with near-tragic results. When Kirrene took her home, the dog bit Kirrene’s son. Back at the shelter in quarantine, the dog would whine and cry when Kirrene walked by, and wound up not getting placed, “She was a very sad case,” Kirrene says.

On a happier note, Erin Long-Scott, a state employee from South Sacramento, adopted Lovie, a frightened-but-sweet, older Chihuahua whose teeth were green and decayed. “When I first got him, they were calling him Dr. Death, because he just looked so bad,” says Long-Scott, who was in the market for a dog who might not otherwise make it out of the shelter.

But Lovie, named for Chicago Bears coach Lovie Smith, faced the equivalent of a fourth and long. When SPCA veterinarian Laurie Siperstein-Cook pulled all but one of Lovie’s rotten teeth, the dog’s jawbone shattered. The veterinary program at the University of California Davis, which collaborates with the SPCA on a number of projects, stepped in to insert a plate connecting Lovie’s chin to the back of his jaw, enabling him to chew.

“No he’s a happy little dog,” Long-Scott reports.

Johnson notes that the SPCA accepted about 100 dogs following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, but the Kern County case represented the largest number of animals it has taken in at one time. In addition to finding new homes for the Kern County animals, the SPCA gained valuable training for a potential future disaster that could cause a similar influx, Johnson says.

Kirrene says shelter staff members were asking themselves, “Could we suddenly house a large number of animals, and how would we do it? We were able to prove to ourselves in this case that we were able to do it.”

Despite the logistical and staffing challenges, Johnson and Kirrene say the SPCA’s Chihuahua endeavor was a positive, collaborative experience. Staff and volunteers rose to the occasion, the local media spread the word about the animals’ arrival, PetSmart Charities supplied crates, and the HSUS staff proved to be caring and well-organized.

Kirrene’s advice to shelters considering something similar is to formulate a plan now. “You never know when HSUS might come calling, or there might be a natural disaster, or there might be a case in your community that requires an SPCA or a humane society to step in.”

The Sacramento SPCA is one of more than 80 shelters in the Emergency Services Placement Partner (ESPP) program, an initiative The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) started in fall 2009 to create a database of quality animal welfare organizations that are ready to step up and help place animals following an emergency rescue.

The HSUS for years has worked with shelters when animals need a place to go following a natural disaster, cruelty case, puppy mill shutdown, or dogfighting bust, explains Inga Fricke, the organization’s director of sheltering initiatives. The ESPP program formalizes those partnerships by requiring shelters to sign up in advance and go through a screening process to make sure the animals will receive proper care.

Participating shelters can generate “a lot of goodwill” as well as community support, Fricke says. “When you take in dogs, particularly from puppy mills, for example, there’s a huge public outpouring of support for those animals, and that usually translates into donations. It translates into a lot more awareness of the shelter and the animals in the shelter. It translates into a lot of adoptions.”

Beyond that, Fricke notes that shelters get “that internal self-satisfaction of knowing that you’ve done something to extend yourself and help the animals.”

The ESPP program is growing in popularity—25 shelters have joined since July—and always looking for new members. Municipal shelters, private shelters, and rescues are eligible and can apply by going to animalsheltering.org/espp or by e-mailing Catherine Lynch at clynch@humanesociety.org.
Move over, Octomom. You’ve got nothing on Biscuit, a stray cat in foster care in Fairmont, Minn., who gave birth to 11 healthy kittens just before Thanksgiving. It’s not a record—the largest litter is believed to be 19 kittens born to a Burmese cat in 1970, 15 of whom survived. But 11 is certainly nothing to sniff at! The 4-year-old, shorthaired buff tabby and her spitting-image offspring were cared for by Sharon Dorow, who has fostered about 160 cats and kittens for Martin County Humane Society in Fairmont over the past 10 years. Considering that there aren’t enough seats at the milk bar for the seven girls and four boys, they seemed to nurse in shifts, according to Dorow. “I went down there early one morning, and ... there were a couple [lying] off to the side,” she says. “I don’t know if they take numbers!” While Biscuit did the majority of the work herself, Dorow says she lent a hand at times, especially when it came to keeping the kittens clean. “She [would] clean the first six, and then she’s, ‘I really don’t want to do this anymore.’” What mother doesn’t think that at some point, usually when the kid hits the teenage years?

Splendor in the grass. The Dutchess County SPCA in Hyde Park, N.Y., broke ground in November on a new, state-of-the-art, 15,000-square-foot facility that will include artificial wetlands designed to process wastewater naturally with plants instead of chemicals and machinery. The shelter, which has been serving Dutchess County since 1871, is the first in the country to install a wetland for this purpose, replacing its septic system with a large garden of reeds, cattails, bulrushes, and other grasses into which used water will be piped. The grasses then take over, breaking down contaminants and purifying the water, which emerges from the wetlands “pure as Poland Spring,” says executive director Joyce Garrity. “It’s aesthetically pleasing and compatible with the environment.” The new building, expected to be completed in 2012, will also include large, bright, communal living areas for cats, indoor exercise areas for dogs, and an education space, which will allow staff to conduct onsite humane education classes for children.

COG-nitive skills. Fairfax County Animal Shelter’s commitment to humanely controlling feral cat colonies has snagged it an award from the Metropolitan Council of Governments, a nonprofit organization of 21 local governments in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. The Animal Services division of the group bestowed its Humane Education Award on the Fairfax, Va., shelter for its trap-neuter-return (TNR) program and Helping Community Cats classes, which train citizens to carry out TNR in managed colonies. Established in October 2008 as part of Alley Cat Allies’ “Every Kitty—Every City” campaign, the program has trained more than 200 people in TNR, and spayed or neutered more than 800 feral cats in Fairfax County. The program is supported by proceeds from the sale of the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles’ Animal Friendly license plates.

Virtual cats raise real money. OK, so you’re a crazy cat lady (or lad). You have a houseful of felines on whom you’ve already dropped a boat-load of cash for super-premium food, handmade toys, and designer duds. What do you do if you have no room for any more furbearers (and you don’t want to become a hoarder)? Go virtual, of course! Last November, the ASPCA launched Operation Cats, a website where visitors could create the animated purr ball of their dreams, be it a lavender longhair with green spots and curly whiskers or a smoke shorthair with orange feet and pink nose. Through the end of December, creators of fake felines could spoil their make-believe babies by using real bucks to buy virtual collars, toys, catnip, a milk fountain. The money all went to support the ASPCA’s spay/neuter programs. By mid-December, more than 3,800 cartoon cats had raised nearly $7,000 to help reduce euthanasia by preventing the birth of unwanted cats and dogs. Operation Cats was such a hit that the ASPCA says it may make another appearance in 2011.

Thieves make out like bandits. Things are not always all butterflies and rainbows in the world of virtual pets. An Italian woman found that out in October when thieves broke into her ersatz apartment on Facebook’s Pet Society game and stole all the virtual items, leaving only the resident virtual cat. According to msnbc.com, Paola Letizia of Palermo, Italy, had spent about $140 decorating the seven-room faux home and showering the blue flat cat with toys and cute outfits. Italian postal police were investigating the theft; if caught, the robbers could face five years in a very real prison for aggravated entry into her e-mail and Facebook account. Perhaps she should have gotten a virtual dog … or a life. ☹