When The HSUS’s Animal Rescue Team and local law enforcement raided a Gary, Ind., dogfighting operation last July, they found dogs stashed everywhere. Some were crated in the kitchen of a trashed house where the occupants had been cooking crack cocaine on the stove. Others languished in feces-laden crates in the basement or outside in the muddy yard. Still others were confined to rusted cages or filthy crates stacked on top of each other inside a decrepit shed, where boarded-up windows blocked out all light.

Outside the back door, the first dog responders saw was Honey, an older pit bull missing a big chunk of her lip. "She was on a heavy logging chain, and she had no food, no water, and was just sitting in basically feces and mud," recalls Chris Schindler, manager of The HSUS’s animal fighting investigations.

The frightened dog would retreat to her decrepit doghouse, emerging only to bark at her rescuers. But that didn’t last long—in 20 minutes, Schindler was able to gain Honey’s trust, pet her, remove her chain, and carry her off the property. She and 19 other seized dogs were taken to a boarding kennel.

That’s where they met Laurie Adams and other trained volunteers from Indianapolis-based Casa Del Toro Pit Bull Education and Rescue.

In 2010, Adams and her volunteers had pioneered a canine enrichment program at Indianapolis Animal Care & Control, offering toys and treats, obedience and agility training, and basic human kindness to keep shelter dogs happy and occupied.

That’s the kind of attention The HSUS sought for the Gary dogs, who would have to stay at the kennel until they could be adopted—a process that could take weeks or even months. They’d need outlets for their energy. “They’re social creatures; they need things to do,” says Anne Sterling,
HSUS Indiana state director. “They get bored—crazy bored … and that’s when they really give up and [don’t] engage with the world anymore.”

Instead, with help from Casa del Toro, the dogs were finally able to experience simple pleasures like running in the grass, soaking in the sun, eating good food, and playing with humans.

Honey—who soon gave birth to two pups—blossomed in their care. “She’s just progressed in leaps and bounds,” Schindler says. “She just became one of the most lovable and friendly dogs.”

Honey has changed a lot of minds about pit bulls, Adams says.

The Road to Change

When she worked as a field supervisor and kennel manager for Indianapolis Animal Care and Control (IACC) back in the late ’90s, Adams witnessed daily the flood of pit bulls who entered the shelter but never left.

It gnawed at her. “When you work in the kennels … you see every dog that comes through there,” Adams recalls. “At the time, a lot of shelters did not do pit bull adoptions, and our shelter was no different.”

The plight of dogs who never really had a chance moved her to take action. She began pulling out those pit bulls she considered highly adoptable and placing them one at a time in homes.

But she wanted to do more. In 1999, she formed Casa Del Toro (in English, “House of the Bull”); today, the group has a network of eight foster homes and about 40 volunteers who participate in fundraisers, adoption and education events, and a kennel enrichment program at her former shelter.

In 2010, Adams—who had stayed in her position at IACC while getting her nonprofit off the ground—resigned to devote herself full time to her rescue efforts and to a new project: developing the kennel enrichment program run by Casa Del Toro volunteers at IACC.

The idea grew out of what Adams had seen while helping out with enrichment for 109 dogs seized during an August 2009 dog-fighting raid in Orange County, Ind., that The HSUS participated in. The dogs, who were being kept in a rented kennel, “were so shut down,” she says. “We started [taking] just baby steps with them,” offering the dogs peanut butter-stuffed chew toys, basic training, and TLC.

Seeing a dramatic improvement in the dogs’ behavior—they went from trembling and cowering in the back of their runs to being relaxed and playful—inspired Adams to develop the program at IACC. The shelter had problems caring for dogs held long-term in cruelty or bite cases; they were housed in the investigation/stray kennels, and at the time, they received little stimulation. Under state law, dogs involved in bite cases aren’t allowed out of their kennels, and it’s likely they will end up being euthanized.

“Those are the dogs that normal volunteers do not get to touch. Nobody goes in those kennels but the kennel workers,” Adams says, noting that the municipal shelter is typically so full of animals and understaffed that employees are hard-pressed to provide enrichment. “There’s a lot of good people there, and as much as they want to, they just don’t have time.”

Help in the Trenches

Casa Del Toro volunteers now work in all of the shelter’s kennels. And they no longer work only with pit bull-type dogs (IACC has been placing them since 2009, after a change in leadership brought about a new policy). Volunteers provide enrichment to all the shelter’s canines and are branching out to work with cats, too. Those who want to work with dogs being held in bite, cruelty, or confiscation cases have to first complete 200 volunteer hours at the shelter, participate in a mentoring program, and take some advanced dog-handling classes.
Volunteers like Shawna Ping, operations manager of the enrichment program, try anything they can think of to stimulate the dogs mentally and physically. That includes playing calming music on CDs so the whole kennel can hear it, and taking scent toys and filling them with dried leaves or grass clippings, or alluring scents like vanilla and sandalwood. Each dog gets a scent toy, or sometimes a food puzzle, to make them think about how to get the treat.

With no direct contact allowed and no time outside the kennels, “we give those animals what they can have,” Adams says.

For dogs who aren’t confined to their runs, volunteers use agility equipment to exercise the dogs, clicker training to teach them basic obedience—such as how to “keep four on the floor,” so they don’t jump when potential adopters approach their kennels—and teach them cute tricks, like how to give a “high five.” They even let them swim in doggie pools in the summertime.

Volunteers have transformed two rooms in the shelter into “real life” rooms, with couches and radios, where they can take dogs for one-on-one time in a home-like setting.

IACC is the largest shelter in the state, as well as Indiana’s busiest animal control department, Sterling says. The city shelter typically houses more than 600 pets, and it takes in about 18,000 animals each year, according to Darcie Kurtz, assistant administrator for kennel operations. The need for enrichment is huge. Given the scope of the challenge, Kurtz says, it’s hard to know just how big an impact the program has had so far. “But anything that you can do for an individual animal can’t help but be good.”

In August, The HSUS presented Casa Del Toro with a $10,000 donation, so the rescue can expand its kennel enrichment program to shelters statewide. Adams and Ping are putting together a starter kit, with basic toys and equipment that other shelters can use to launch their own programs.

“Laurie is a phenomenally gifted person. I think she’s an incredible dog handler,” Sterling says. “Casa Del Toro is dealing with one of the most neglected types of dogs, in Indiana and throughout the country. They’re doing amazing things in giving these dogs … care that they otherwise wouldn’t have.”
Society in Maine. The Second Chance Animal Shelter of Massachusetts, which had sent staff to help out at the emergency shelter, also took in 12 of the dogs, including one injured pooch named Ebony, who had a broken jaw that had been untreated. “Being up there every week, I just fell in love with Ebony,” said executive director Sheryl Blancato. “It broke my heart that such a sweet dog had endured so much.”

Heads Up!
The biggest and best conference for the animal welfare field is The HSUS’s annual Animal Care Expo, this year May 21-24 at the Rio All-Suite Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas. Register by March 31 to save $50. Visit animalsheltering.org/expo for details.

The redesigned animalsheltering.org has launched! Come check out the new site and explore all the resources we have to help you work smarter. One of the new features is an interactive training calendar where you can post your local events—go to animalsheltering.org/events to give it a try. We’ve also launched Marketplace, a comprehensive source for products and services for the animal care field. Special offers and discounts will be offered monthly—check it out at animalsheltering.org/marketplace.

Feb. 28 is the 18th Annual World Spay Day, and February is Spay/Neuter Awareness Month. It’s not too late to participate—visit worldspayday.org to register your event. AS

Kudos & Thank Yous

What’s New, Pussycats? For the kitties placed at a Florida adopt-a-thon in August, the answer is “Homes!” A huge multi-agency rescue led by Alachua County Animal Services resulted in the seizure of nearly 700 cats from a sanctuary-turned-hoarder in June. Multiple organizations—including The HSUS, Alachua County Animal Services, RedRover, All Cats Healthcare Clinic, the Alachua Humane Society, and the Maddie’s Shelter Medicine Program at the University of Florida—pitched in to help with their care at a temporary shelter for more than five months. Visitors to the shelter included Doreen and Oliver Bauer, whose work with feral cats was profiled in the September-October 2011 issue of Animal Sheltering and who took in six of the rescued felines. Rescuers grew quite attached to the orange tabby above—or rather, he became attached to them! By late summer, most of the cats were healthy enough to start going home, and in September, the groups held a massive adoption event that attracted hundreds of participants—and 257 feline friends went home with new families.

Puppy mills AND a hurricane—what next? In July, the Vermont State Police, assisted by The HSUS, the Humane Society of Chittenden County, and the Franklin County Humane Society, seized 58 malnourished, dehydrated, and parasite-infested Labrador dogs from an alleged puppy mill. In September, after seven weeks of caring for the animals at a temporary location (the emergency shelter even expanded to take in some animals who needed shelter after Hurricane Irene), The HSUS got legal custody and was able to begin placing the animals. Many area shelters stepped up to help, including the Windham County Humane Society; the Humane Society of Chittenden County; the Central Vermont Humane Society; and the Animal Welfare Society in New York.

Tara Loller of The HSUS gets a trademark greeting from Velcro, a super-friendly kitty who was among nearly 700 cats rescued in June from a Florida hoarder.
Pets in Maine can breathe a little easier—literally—knowing that Bobby Silcott is on the case.

Silcott, 50, works as an animal control officer for six towns in southwestern Maine, and also serves as a volunteer firefighter/emergency medical technician in Naples, his hometown. Two and a half years ago he combined those interests by founding the Maine POM Project, which aims to equip fire departments and rescue organizations throughout the state with oxygen masks for pets. They come in three sizes and fit “anything from a gerbil up to a Great Dane,” he says. Silcott teaches first aid classes to raise money to help pay for the masks; he also takes donations at themainepomproject.org, and promotes the program through a Facebook page.

A former truck driver, Silcott became an ACO about six years ago, after his bad back made driving difficult. His work with animals includes serving on the boards of the Harvest Hills Animal Shelter and the Maine Federation of Humane Societies, and developing a dog park on 10 acres donated by the town of Naples. His own menagerie of adopted animals includes Angela the cat and two dogs, Elvis and Priscilla.

In the edited interview below, Silcott discusses his work with Animal Sheltering associate editor James Hettinger.

Animal Sheltering: Tell us about your project to supply emergency personnel with pet oxygen masks.

Bobby Silcott: In May of 2009, I started teaching Red Cross-certified dog or cat first aid/CPR classes. I’d known about these masks for a couple years before that, but my problem was I had no money. They cost 75 bucks a set. After taking the class, it just occurred to me that this is the way that I can raise money, so I got certified to teach the classes. And since May of 2009, we’ve been able to present 162 sets of these pet oxygen masks completely free of charge to local fire and rescue departments. Ultimately, the goal is to equip the entire state of Maine.

According to the ASPCA, anywhere from 40,000 to 150,000 pets perish every year from smoke inhalation alone. I don’t have the numbers here in Maine, but I know if you save one animal, it means the world to that family.

I’ve witnessed that firsthand. Ironically enough, one of our volunteer firefighter’s house was struck by lightning. Actually, it struck a tree in the backyard. And it was really interesting to see somebody who’s been a volunteer firefighter for over 20 years suddenly become the victim. He was no different than any other victim. His main concern was where was his cat, Spike.

Deputy chief [Chris] Burnham found the cat. It was behind the wood stove, unconscious, not breathing. Brought it out to me, and 20 minutes later I was able to give it back to the owner, and you would think nothing even happened to it. I believe a big part of that is those pet oxygen masks, because they’re designed to fit [the animals].

When I’m dead and gone, hopefully these things are still around, saving animals. When you stop to think about it, it’s pretty heavy.

What advice would you give a young person thinking of entering the field?

I found out long ago—and actually, a therapist told me this—that no matter how hard you try, it’s impossible to rationalize irrational thinking. And that simple statement has saved me a lot of grief, because when I first got into this, I was constantly asking myself, “Why? How? There’s no way that someone could not see that that is wrong.” The fact is, they’re not thinking rationally. They’re not looking at it on the same level you are.

If you weren’t an ACO, is there anything else you’d want to do?

Probably drive a tractor trailer again over the road. That was a job I really thoroughly enjoyed. I looked at myself as a paid tourist when I was doing that. AS
Tipping the Scales: Getting Fat Cats Up and Out

If holiday partying has made your jeans snug, you’re probably eager to shed a few pounds. Losing weight is even more cumbersome for fat cats confined in small cages. Thinking big can help you find homes for your chubby kitties.

Capital Area Humane Society in Hilliard, Ohio, houses fat cats in an area called Weight-Loss Camp, where they have room to burn a few extra calories. The shelter offers fat cats for $15 each, or two for $20, a huge discount from the usual adoption fee of $70 per adult cat. This year’s fattest cat was a 6-year-old shorthair who weighed in at 23 pounds.

Progressive Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) in Lynnwood, Wash., conducted a blog/Facebook challenge to get donated work-to-eat cat toys. PAWS explained how these toys help the cats, videotaped the cats enjoying the toys, and directed people to specific toys on Amazon.com, which made it easy for the donor to buy and ship their purchase to the shelter. The toys make fat cats more active, and, because it’s fun to watch them work for their food, fat cats get noticed more by potential adopters.

The SPCA Tampa Bay in Florida has volunteer feline counselors, also known as “purr-sonal trainers,” compete for the highest adoption total. One adopted fat cat can easily trump five kittens, because the tally accounts for the cats’ weights, not their numbers! Deducting cats’ weights from the adoption fee doesn’t hurt either. The shelter has also transformed an area outside the cat kennel into a small garden with low-calorie snacks—catnip and cat grass—which has boosted adoptions: A cat being walked on a leash in the garden attracts instant attention, and fat cats get priority for leash walks. Cage signage indicating that a cat is a leash-walker helps them fly (well, waddle) out the door. Adopters can purchase harnesses and are taught how to fit them properly. They are urged to check the fit often, in the hopes that the harness will need tightening before too long.

Turbocharging Pit Bull Adoptions

Many shelters today struggle to adopt out the sometimes-overwhelming number of pit bulls and pit-bull-type dogs who come through their doors. Animal Farm Foundation (AFF) has designed a program to help these dogs find homes. Implementing just one small piece of this program—marketing the dogs through community events—can take your pit bull placements a long way.

“If you’re trying to sell the idea of adopting out a pit bull, you need to bring the dogs to where the people are,” says Stacey Coleman, executive director of AFF.

Coleman recommends combing local newspapers and event calendars to get the skinny on what’s hot. Festivals, sporting events, and even farmers markets can be great places for your dogs to get noticed. Some people don’t know much about pit bulls—they may never have met one!—so integrating them into normal activities can be a great backdrop for that first meeting.

When choosing dogs for these events, choose the most friendly, outgoing, well-behaved dogs you have. Eye candy is a good idea too, so if you’ve got a perfectly mannered, pretty princess pit bull, bring her along.

Coleman recommends against bringing a dog with a really sad back story to these events—you’ll want to create a positive air around your dogs. Also, resist the urge to bring the staff favorite who’s been with you for six months and is really sweet, but has a few behavior issues.

Taking your dogs to events is not only a great opportunity for the dogs, but for staff and volunteers as well. It’s a nice change of pace and can provide your people with a project they can “own.” When selecting staff or volunteers, be sure to choose people who are confident, outgoing, and friendly, and can handle tough (and ill-informed) questions about pit bulls. AS

Tell us the skinny on your strategies to find homes for fat cats at asm@humane society.org.

— Nancy Peterson

For more ideas about how you can turbocharge your shelter’s pit bull adoptions, check out AFF’s free video at vimeo.com/27018082.

—Adam Goldfarb
Pit bull-boxer mix Nikki is a lover, not a fighter—but had the SPCA of Tampa Bay not intervened, she might have turned out differently.

Nikki was picked up by humane officer Jill Purl in January 2011 when she was only 8 to 10 weeks old. She and her mother had been stolen, but her owner had found her again—tied up alone in a neighborhood backyard, with tiny rubber bands wrapped so tightly around her ears that they had sliced deeply into her flesh. Her ears were actually rotting off her head, and her mother was nowhere to be found.

Her owner had called the SPCA because he said he couldn’t afford the urgent veterinary care needed for her injuries. Purl came out to pick up the dog, and immediately took Nikki to the SPCA, so staff could begin treating her.

Cherie Buisson, a veterinarian formerly on the shelter’s medical team, was doing relief work that day, and remembers Nikki all too well. “If someone said the word ‘suffering’ to me now, the look on her face comes to mind. She barely acknowledged that I was there, and her ears were just swollen, and they stunk, and it was just awful,” Buisson says.

Buisson put Nikki under anesthesia. She found the rubber bands wrapped around her ears twice. Buisson took photos of the injuries to document them for a possible criminal case, then amputated her ears.

Buisson and Purl speculate that Nikki might have been bound for a fighting ring, and that her abusers had been attempting to crop her ears to deny her canine opponents a hold during fights. But it quickly became evident that she wasn’t a fighter by nature. “We started to wake her up, and the first thing she did was start wagging her tail. … She started licking my fingers,” Buisson recalls.

News of the cruelty the puppy had gone through spread quickly through local TV broadcasts and the St. Petersburg Times. Steve and Kelli Chickos of Dunedin (pronounced “dun-EE-din”), a nearby town, saw the story on the news. “It was just the most pathetic and sad sight, to see this little [dog], just the tiniest thing that you could hold in your hands, with her ears clinging to her head,” Kelli says.

Kelli had recently included SPCA Tampa Bay in her estate planning, and she’d been invited to attend a luncheon honoring shelter supporters. At that lunch, Purl walked into the room carrying Nikki, still recovering from her surgery just five days before. “I started crying my eyes out, and I couldn’t take my eyes off of her. I just instantly felt like I have to make sure the rest of her life is full of love,” Kelli says. She immediately began inquiring about adopting Nikki. Dozens of others applied too, but Steve and Kelli soon emerged as the leading candidates. They had already adopted two cats from the shelter, and had long been involved in greyhound rescue, sharing their home with four senior dogs of the breed, plus Jaxson, a Catahoula mix.

And they wanted to adopt Nikki in part to help other dogs like her. “The acting director of the SPCA said they picked us because
I said that I would help Nikki be an ambassador for the breed … that could speak out against animal cruelty,” Kelli says.

She’s kept her word: Kelli and Nikki have become regular attractions at the shelter’s outreach and humane education events, showing up at events such as Pit Bull Awareness Day in October and Volunteer Appreciation Night.

In March of 2011, “they invited her to be one of the guest stars in their big gala, and we had this little black dress made for Nikki,” Kelli says, laughing. Nikki is also the inspiration for Nikki’s Ninjas, a team Kelli has formed to participate in SPCA Tampa Bay’s biggest annual fundraiser, a 3K pet walk.

Though Nikki has become a powerful symbol of the need to combat animal cruelty, no one has been charged in her case. Police were told conflicting stories about who injured her, and no clear-cut proof has emerged. Nikki has totally healed from her ordeal, showing no ill effects from the experience (apart from her closely cropped ears). She has a normal, active life in the Chickos household, where she is “besties” with dog pal Jaxson, Kelli reports.

In her “public” life, Nikki has become a humane education superstar in the community. “They always invite her back [to the shelter] for all sorts of things, and I’m just Nikki’s mom. Nobody really knows my name, and that’s just fine,” Kelli says, laughing.

Steve and Kelli Chickos of Dunedin, Fla., adopted Nikki from the SPCA of Tampa Bay after Kelli saw a story about Nikki on the local news. Nikki has become best buds with their dog, Jaxson, a Catahoula mix.
Keeping Them Hoppy
Taking rabbits for a walk
Carlin Abbitt grew up with a menagerie of animals in and around her home, and when she began volunteering at the Washington Humane Society in the District of Columbia, she found a new group of critters to care for.

She noticed that while the cats had their proponents and the dogs had theirs, the small animals didn’t get as much action. “I think that a lot of people just aren’t used to small animals like I am,” she says. So as she stayed, she began gravitating toward the little guys more and more often, trying to provide them with more fun and enrichment.

At a pet supply store, she recently picked up a harness designed specifically for small animals, and began taking some of the shelter’s rabbits out to the puppy play area to exercise. Some of the bunnies took to the new playtime immediately; others were more hesitant—but the very first bunny Abbitt took out, a white rabbit named Topsy, was over the moon about the situation. “She literally kicked up her heels,” Abbitt says.

But regardless of their behavior in the playpen, most of the rabbits seem to be benefiting from their workouts: Back in their cages, many of them stretch out as though they’ve just come from a great exercise session and are ready to kick back and chill. And shelter staff have noticed a decrease in some of their occasional cage-stress behaviors.

It’s a great reminder that small animals need enrichment, too. If you want to try this out with some of your own bunnies, make sure you’ve got a harness that fits them comfortably, and let them hop to it in a safe, confined space.

Got a tip for enrichment or adoption of your squeakers, squawkers, or slitherers? Tell us about it at asm@humanesociety.org.

We’re opening the Mouthpieces department to reader submissions! So many shelters and rescues have produced fantastic public service announcements. If you’ve created one you’d like to share so that other groups can use it, please submit it to us. We’ll use some of the best ones in the magazine.

The small print: Submitted PSAs can retain your organizational branding, but you must be OK with allowing other groups to add their contact info so that they’ll be able to use the ad in their own communities.

The technical stuff: Our preferred file format is PDF/X-1a:2001 with crop marks at least .125 inches from artwork. Accepted alternate file formats are QuarkXPress, InDesign, Illustrator, or Photoshop. If an ad is submitted in a format other than PDF, graphics and fonts must be included — images must be CMYK and 300 dpi. Line art must be at least 600 dpi. The dimensions must be (or must be adjustable to) full page including bleed: 8.375 inches by 10.75 inches; live area/non bleed: 7.125 inches by 9.5 inches.

To submit a PSA for use in Mouthpieces, please contact us at asm@humanesociety.org.

Check out the new Shelter Pet Project television and radio public service announcements that went live in November? You can be a part of the Shelter Pet Project movement. Here’s how:

✓ Post your adoptable pets to Petfinder.com to ensure the public can find your shelter.
✓ Help bring the campaign to your community!
   If you’re interested in reaching out to local media, we can help. Email us at info@animalsheltering.org.
✓ Join us at facebook.com/ShelterPetProject.

The Shelter Pet Project is the result of a collaborative effort between The Humane Society of the United States and Maddie’s Fund, and the Ad Council, the leading producer of public service advertising (PSA) campaigns. The goal is to make shelters the first place potential adopters turn when looking to adopt a new pet, ensuring that all healthy and treatable pets find loving homes. Visit theshelterpetproject.org to find out more information about the campaign and to view the PSAs.
Baby, it’s cold outside.

BUT DOES IT HAVE TO BE SO EMBARRASSING?
There are more practical ways to keep me safe and warm this winter.

1. First off, keep me inside! I’m happiest when I can curl up with you. So is the cat. He HATES being cold.

2. If we’re going to go romp in the snow a lot, make sure I get enough food and water. Keeping warm burns more of my energy. (And I need my energy to cope with the cat.)

3. When you take me out for a walk, clean up my paws with a damp towel afterward. Snow clumps and that salty stuff that melts ice gets into my pads and irritates them.

4. Don’t let me eat any antifreeze. That blue stuff tastes awesome to me, but it’s super poisonous.

5. Finally, can you consider another color for my couture? Pink makes me look fat.
Doing a World of Good
A new name reflects an annual spay/neuter initiative’s scope

BY JAMES HETTINGER

It started 18 years ago as Spay Day USA, but The HSUS’s annual campaign to call attention to the importance of spay/neuter has always included participants from around the world. Run in cooperation with The HSUS’s global affiliate, Humane Society International (HSI), the event last year attracted participants from 46 countries. And now, its name will reflect that global scope.

The last Tuesday in February, known in recent years simply as Spay Day, has been rechristened World Spay Day. “It’s truly more an international event now than it ever has been, so the name World Spay Day better reflects what the program actually is,” explains Vicki Stevens, a senior project manager for The HSUS and the event’s coordinator. Set for Feb. 28 this year, World Spay Day will take place during Spay/Neuter Awareness Month. Animal welfare organizations, individuals, and businesses will team up throughout February to hold events promoting spay/neuter as a way to curb pet overpopulation and prevent animals from being euthanized in shelters. Many of the events offer low-cost spay/neuter surgeries to targeted populations, Stevens says. Participating organizations also hold fundraisers, set up spay/neuter displays in local libraries, or distribute materials at community gatherings.

The HSUS runs a related photo contest that allows people to post photos of their pets online, then solicit votes at $1 apiece to raise money for an eligible animal welfare organization’s spay/neuter program. The Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association (HSVMA), the veterinary affiliate of The HSUS, is a World Spay Day partner, and HSVMA’s Rural Area Veterinary Services program receives photo-contest money to help spay and neuter animals.

The importance of the cause is beyond question. “Spay/neuter solves almost all the problems that we have in rescue,” says Judy Cataldo, a volunteer for the Merrimack River Feline Rescue Society in Massachusetts, which has held Spay Day events for several years, including last year teaming with the Massachusetts SPCA on a 24-hour spay-a-thon. “People turn in animals because of aggression or because of spraying or wandering or whatever, and it’s like—spay/neuter. Cats get feline leukemia or FIV. Why? Because they weren’t spayed and neutered. It just all keeps coming back to spay/neuter.”

The House Rabbit Connection, a foster program serving central Connecticut and western Massachusetts, took part in its first Spay Day last year, and president Marlene Wilhelm says she hopes to “amp it up a little bit more” this year by holding more events in pet stores (the group did about five last year) and distributing more information about the importance of spay/neuter.

Similarly, Wilhelm wants to promote the photo contest more (including a mention in the group’s newsletter, The Pursuit of Happiness) so the House Rabbit Connection can increase its share from a few hundred dollars to more than $1,000. And last year the group worked with Springfield, Mass., mayor Domenic Sarno to pass a Spay Day proclamation. Wilhelm hopes to build on that effort this year with a statewide proclamation from Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick.

Twenty or 30 years ago, Wilhelm recalls, pet rabbits were typically confined to a backyard hutch. Owners today have learned that pet rabbits are intelligent, social animals who belong indoors, she adds, but progress has been slower on convincing owners to spay or neuter. “I see the trend going in the right direction,” Wilhelm says. “I’d like to see it go faster.”

The HSUS helps organizations publicize their events through a website (worldspayday.org), and offers advice through a downloadable event planning guide. Registered participants can also get free posters and handouts; merchandise is available at cost.

Still on the fence about taking part? “I’d say get involved. I think the public loves it,” says Mary Ellen Zoulas, a veterinarian and medical director for the Seattle Animal Shelter’s Spay and Neuter Clinic. The municipal shelter has taken part in Spay Day since at least 2000, and its events offering free spay/neuter surgeries have created lines that stretched around the block, Zoulas says.

Spay Day events remind the participants that they’re part of a larger community promoting spay/neuter, she notes. “It’s a builder of community—everyone getting together for one unified purpose.”

To learn more about World Spay Day, participate in the photo contest, or to register an event, go to worldspayday.org.
A “Pound” No More

In June, Denver Animal Care & Control opened its new, 36,000-square-foot animal shelter—a vast improvement from its 30-year-old site. The $17 million facility, nearly triple the size of the old structure, features separate lobbies for adoption services and lost and found; energy-efficient heated flooring and natural daylight throughout; colony rooms and condos for adoptable cats; medical isolation areas to reduce disease transmission; and a surgical suite that will allow for on-site spay/neuter and care for injured animals. The shelter is also on track to achieve certification in Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) at the Gold level, with the potential to obtain LEED-NC Platinum, which would make it the first building in Denver to be so designated—as well as the first animal shelter in the country at that level of certification. “That would be an extraordinary honor to achieve that,” says Heather Lewis, a principal at Animal Arts in Boulder and the project manager for the shelter’s design. The response has been great, according to Doug Kelley, director of the agency. “Our visitation is up about 28 percent, and the public has been very impressed. When people used to come to the old shelter, we would struggle with educating them that the ‘pound’ is no longer a word that’s used in association with animal shelters,” he says. “... And we just don’t get people saying ‘pound’ when they come in here.”

Room(s) with a View

In September, the Peninsula Humane Society unveiled its new Tom and Annette Lantos Center for Compassion in Burlingame, Calif., a $25 million, 56,700-square-foot space, located within both a new building and an existing three-story structure, connected via a bridged elevator lobby. The facility was specifically designed to bring areas of the old shelter into full view of the public, including a wildlife rehabilitation room behind a huge, floor-to-ceiling window; a kitten nursery room, where visitors can watch feedings; and the Canine Enrichment Center, a two-story, indoor/outdoor area where staff and volunteers work with shelter dogs. The center features a retractable roof, artificial turf, and doggie water fountains—decorated to look like dogs’ heads—that empty into drinking basins. The shelter also has two large aviaries where injured birds such as hawks and owls stay until they regain the ability to fly; the public can’t access these areas, but visitors can watch the birds on a monitor on the first floor. “We’re still learning how visitors walk through our facility, what they find interesting,” says Scott Delucchi, senior vice president of community relations. “Everyone [wants] to look at the kittens, and the volunteers doing the feeding. It’s pretty adorable.” The shelter was intended to integrate the important, sobering issues of humane education and domestic and wildlife animal care with the playful, humorous side of the human-animal bond, according to George Miers of Swatt/Miers Associates, the architecture firm that designed the shelter. From painted Groucho Marx quotes to the reruns of Lassie on the TV monitors, “the Center for Compassion reminds us of the incredible importance of animals in our lives,” Miers says.

A “Destination” Shelter

In July, the Ottawa Humane Society opened its new, $17 million, 40,000-square-foot shelter, replacing an inadequate facility built in 1967. The building houses the municipal animal shelter, an adoption center, a humane education center, and an expanded veterinary clinic. Dogs are housed in brighter, pod-style kennels, with outdoor runs covered in artificial turf. Adoptable cats live in community rooms and condos with access to toys, climbing trees, and an indoor/outdoor cat porch. The facility also has a central spray cleaning system (the old kennels were cleaned by mop and lacked drains). The lobby features a large, open area called a “rabbitat,” where visitors can view adoptable rabbits, and the entire facility has a modern HVAC system and isolation rooms that have a near-hospital air quality, according to Mandy Chepeka, manager of communications. “People are just so much happier to be here ... [The old facility] looked like a place that animals needed to be rescued from, and that’s not what a humane society is,” she says. “There are a lot of people going to [see] it as a destination, because of the adoption area,” says Sandy Davis of Barry J. Hobin & Associates Architects in Ottawa, who served as principal architect, while George Miers of Swatt/Miers was consulting architect. “They were basically working out of a broom closet before.”
On Sept. 14, 2010—the opening day of the Asheville Humane Society’s new adoption and education center—a wide-eyed young boy approached the reception desk and asked, “Are those dogs available for adoption?”

Mounted on the walls behind the reception area, groups of tiles picturing a variety of dogs had caught his eye.

“No, they aren’t available for adoption,” the receptionist explained with a smile. “Those pets belong to people who love them so much, they created our ‘Wall of Love’ to help all the animals find homes.”

Known to Asheville Humane Society (AHS) staff as the “bricks-and-tiles project,” the “Wall of Love” effort began as a fundraising initiative to help complete the adoption center capital campaign, giving donors the opportunity to pay tribute to pets, individuals, and organizations. The wall now provides a cheerful, colorful visual for anyone who comes to visit our shelter.

Donors could purchase a photo tile in two sizes: 4 inches square for $250, or 8 inches square for $500. Bricks, which were placed on the exterior walkway entrance, could be inscribed with the name of a person, a pet, or an organization. Bricks were priced at $100, or $110 for those who wanted a paw print added.

We found that the $100 bricks were the most popular format with donors, due to the more affordable cost and the ability to gift a brick to friends or family. Of the two tiles, donors preferred the larger 8-by-8 versions. Both bricks and tiles were produced by local vendors at modest costs, resulting in nearly 80 percent of the purchase price directly benefitting AHS.

Local volunteers donated professional copywriting, illustration, design, and photography to produce brochures advertising the project. We reminded people that “A puppy can’t be saddled with a mortgage,” (making the connection between their donations and the costs of building our new facility). We also had some brochures specific to the wall: “All the top dogs in town will be there,” “All the cool cats in town will be there,” and “Honor thy Animal (or Animal Lover).”
We targeted a list of area pet-related businesses for distribution of our brochures, including veterinarians, groomers, pet boutiques, and doggy day care establishments. We recruited board members, staff, and volunteers to deliver brochures, ready for display in acrylic holders. A veterinary practice agreed to staple the brochure to its receipts, and several businesses that aren’t pet-related displayed them as well.

Project publicity included email blasts to more than 4,000 supporters, print and electronic newsletter coverage, and a website link to the brochures. The most effective advertising proved to be word-of-mouth, or through personalized notes sent with a brochure to friends. One of those resulted in a $100,000 contribution to the campaign, in addition to the nearly $100,000 raised by sales of bricks and tiles.

Meticulous planning and record-keeping were crucial to the project’s success; donors were paying to honor their pets or other important people, so making sure that everyone was accounted for and names were spelled correctly was critical. As construction progressed, staff and board members developed a schematic for tile placement throughout the adoption center’s public areas. As a result, groups of tiles spell out the words to denote dog, puppy, and cat areas in an attractive and engaging manner.

For any group wanting to try this, we advise deciding early how much text and what kind of images will be acceptable, and not to make exceptions. While the project required painstaking record-keeping, it was worthwhile; it’s a visually appealing part of the new facility, and donors who ordered a brick or tile really love seeing it.

“The tiles range from really great shots taken by a professional down to little faded snapshots that you can tell are 20 years old,” says Jim Fulton, director of programs. The wall even includes at least one fictitious beast: “There’s even a drawing of a unicorn. I always tell kids that whoever finds the unicorn wins.”

AHS continues to promote the purchase of bricks and tiles for additional areas of the adoption center. A donor appreciation event in September 2011 gave donors the opportunity to view their brick or tile in place.

“These tiles are magical,” says Katherine McGowan Shenar, the shelter’s president and CEO. “I’ve watched as folks have located their beloved pet’s tile on the wall, and tears fill their eyes. I wish that every homeless animal in our care finds a home where they feel this depth of love.” AS

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Laurel Hunt is the author of Angel Pawprints: Reflections on Loving and Losing a Canine Companion and Angel Whiskers: Reflections on Loving and Losing a Feline Companion. She serves on the board of AHS and volunteers with Paws on a Mission’s pet therapy program. Her blog, Bark Wag Love, includes fundraising ideas for shelter and pet therapy programs, pet loss resources, and human-animal bond stories at laurelhuntbooks.com.

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Reclassifying Hoarding

Sheltering professionals have long been aware of the filth and disease that hoarders force upon the animals they collect, but the recent proliferation of reality television shows about hoarding has finally dragged this poorly understood disorder out of the shadows and into the public spotlight. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) recognizes hoarding as a serious mental illness that is difficult to treat, but its classification as an obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) has in many cases kept sufferers from getting a clear diagnosis and insurance coverage for treatment. Hoarders often don’t fit neatly into the OCD category. For example, OCD patients are usually aware that they have a problem and want desperately to conquer it, while many hoarders insist there’s nothing wrong with them. Blind to the filth they live in, they often show elements of addictive behavior, post-traumatic stress disorder, and many other problems. Now the APA is considering changing how the illness is classified. The group began studying the issue in 2010 and is contemplating spinning hoarding off as a separate disorder for the 2013 version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders, a move that may make it easier for hoarders to get the help they need.

Shop Till You Drop

Attention, shopaholics! Now you can indulge your habit and help homeless pets at the same time. Shop your favorite online stores through adoptashelter.com, and a percentage of whatever you spend will be donated by the stores to the animal nonprofit organization of your choice (maybe your own! You could be funding a raise for yourself by shopping! OK, maybe we’re getting carried away). The website is the brainchild of Chris Ruben, a Texas-based marketing consultant whose clients include pet product companies. He wanted to help shelters devote their time to caring for animals and worry less about fundraising. “We were trying to find a fundraising tool that was free, easy to use, no login, no password, and people would do what they’re normally doing—shopping online,” says Ruben. Simply go to adoptashelter.com, choose the shelter or group to receive the donation, then click on “Shop Now” to buy at Amazon, Wal-Mart, PetSmart, and hundreds of other big-name retailers. Every penny of the percentage each store agrees to donate goes to that charity. Users can also nominate organizations to be added to the site. You can’t take it with you, so why not spend like there’s no tomorrow?

Calling all Adopters

Looking for a new pet? If you live in the Washington, D.C., area, you can let your fingers do the talking with a smartphone app from the Animal Welfare League of Arlington (AWLA) in Northern Virginia. Designed for the iPhone and iPad, the app displays real-time photos and information about cats, dogs, birds, rabbits, and other small animals available for adoption at the shelter. “It’s much more user-friendly for someone using a smartphone,” says Susan Sherman, AWLA’s deputy executive director. “If you just look at a Web page, everything is very small and hard to see. This is a very clean design, configured for that size.” Board member Ron Novak of Segue Technologies Inc. of Arlington developed the app and donated it to the AWLA, saving the organization thousands of dollars. More than 650 users have downloaded the app, available for free in the iTunes App Store, since it was launched in spring 2011.
Arms of Steel, Hearts of Gold

Fans may know them as heavy hitters on the field of competitive sports, but three professional athletes in Baltimore want the world to know that behind those bulging muscles, shaved heads, and fearsome tattoos are tender hearts that love their pets. The Baltimore Sun reports that Ravens linebacker Jarret Johnson, Orioles centerfielder Adam Jones, and mixed martial arts fighter John Rallo teamed up with the Mayor’s Anti-Animal Abuse Advisory Committee in a public service campaign entitled “Show Your Soft Side,” which rolled out in October to send kids the message that macho does not equal mean. “Hurting an animal is not a rite of passage to show your manhood,” says committee director Caroline Griffin, who developed the campaign along with advertising executive Sande Riesett after a string of horrific animal abuse crimes committed by juveniles. In a radio spot, the 260-pound football player baby talks to his dog, while on his poster, the martial artist’s massive arms cradle his black-and-white cat, Doobie. “Only a punk would hurt a cat or dog” is the slogan. Whatever you say, sir!

Grow, Fur, Grow!

Rumpelstiltskin made his name by spinning straw into gold. You can make yours by turning cat hair into cute stuff like pincushions, finger puppets, and of course cat toys. Crafting with Cat Hair: Cute Handicrafts to Make with Your Cat, by Japanese writer Kaori Tsutaya, is admittedly a cute book, filled with photographs and detailed instructions on how to harvest (brush the cat, don’t shave her) and process cat fur (wash the fur, not the cat) and create adorable products that would most likely sell like hotcakes at a cat show. We fear the negative effect this could have on the lint roller industry, but what a great way to get those lazy cats to earn their keep.

Tail of the Tags

If cats could drive, they would so get this license plate. Maryland drivers can support feral cat spay/neuter programs by ordering the “Trap Neuter Return” license plate, which raises awareness about ferals and trap-neuter-return organizations throughout the state. Many states have animal-friendly plates that support spay/neuter programs, but this one is dedicated entirely to feral cat welfare. Proceeds benefit Community Cats Maryland, a Baltimore-based nonprofit that receives $20 per plate. But fundraising wasn’t the main point behind the plates according to cofounder Peg Nemoff. “The idea … was to get the word out about TNR,” she says. For more information, visit communitycatsmd.org.