Winter or summer, in good weather or bad, Fences for Fido (FFF) puts up fences. But the Portland, Ore.-based animal non-profit with chapters in Washington state is actually removing barriers by doing so, giving families who previously chained their dogs access to a better option for the animals.

Take the work the group did for “the Railroad Five,” a group of four pit bull mixes and one cattle dog, so nicknamed for their proximity to train tracks in Aurora, Ore. After more than five years on chains in an isolated backyard with no shelter from the elements, on a rainy day in November 2011, their time on the chain gang came to an end. Twenty volunteers who’d spent the past three hours putting up a fence for the dogs stood in the cold backyard and cheered as they watched several of the railroad pups joyfully dashing around their new enclosure. In a matter of a few hours, they had gained increased freedom and quality of life, when 18 days before—despite the fact that one dog had only three legs, another dog was pregnant, and all five dogs were starved for affection—the family said they did not want a fence.

Yet after FFF outreach volunteers forged a bond with the family and gained their trust, the dogs’ family “went from complete resistance to cautious acceptance,” says Kelly Peterson, co-founder of FFF. Peterson attributes this to the group’s nonjudgmental attitude. “There are a lot of complicated factors that go into families feeling that chaining is their only option. Most times chaining is a last resort for people, so we accept those circumstances and want to be a catalyst for change.”

In fact, change has been the one constant for the 2,000 supporters and donors (and 8,000 Facebook fans) of the all-volunteer organization founded by several Portland women in May 2009. “Our initial, modest goal was to change the life of one dog per month,” says Peterson, adding that the idea sprang from seeing a video about the accomplishments of the Coalition to Unchain Dogs in Durham, N.C.

Within a few months, FFF was surpassing its goal and attracting a substantial following. FFF now has four Northwest chapters...
Lexy, a 2-year-old pit bull in Gervais, Ore., and her brother Bruno used to be chained separately, but they are now living happily together in a fenced enclosure built by Fences for Fido.

A neighbor informed FFF of Chopper’s need for a fence, but clients also come from other sources, such as owner self-referral and networking from partner organizations like the Oregon Humane Society and Multnomah County Animal Services. “Portland is an urban area, and when dogs are loose, it can be dangerous,” says Mike Oswald, director of animal services for Multnomah County. Oswald regularly refers urgent cases, and cases involving ordinance violations, to FFF. “We help people succeed in keeping their dogs by making it conditional upon their getting or fixing a fence,” Oswald says.

Replacing dog chains with good fences minimizes problems for dog owners and communities alike, says Oswald. One case in point is Oso, a 127-pound Rottweiler. A stranger trespassed into Martin Arellano’s backyard in Hubbard, Ore., and unhooked Oso’s chain, loosing a dog who might be perceived as threatening into the neighborhood. Peterson had happened by Arellano’s house due to a caring neighbor’s email report on Oso filed two days before. Peterson spent a half hour helping Arellano locate his dog, after which she suggested a fence.

“He’s a gentle giant,” says Arellano, referring to his companion and his habit of roaming at will when the family lived on a farm. Since January when the fence went up and Oso got off his chain, he’s morphed from lethargic to energetic.

The majority of supplies, such as cedar posts and welded wire, are donated to FFF or discounted significantly by Home Depot to around $400 to $600 per fence, provided the materials are purchased in high volume. “It’s a gift we give to these families,” Peterson says.

The fences not only help to contain dogs and provide them with exercise room, but also safeguard them from other animals and likely decrease the number of biting cases and unwanted litters of puppies. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control reports that chained dogs are nearly three times more likely to bite than unchained dogs.

“A dog on a 2-foot chain tied to a tree will develop a spiritually broken personality,” says Wendy Reimer, investigator for the Oregon Humane Society. On average, Reimer refers one chained dog case per week to FFF, and applauds the group’s fast response time and compassion. “They’re saving lives.”

FFF doesn’t stop at fences. It also donates all-weather dog houses and, at times, temporary zip lines for dogs on the waiting list for a fence (outreach coordinators prioritize emergency situations, such as a dog with inconsistent access to food and water, or a pet who’s outside 24 hours a day). Depending on circumstances, clients may receive critical vet care and spay/neuter services. Volunteers return for twice-yearly follow-up visits to check on fence safety and monitor changes in animal-owner relationships, such as stronger bonds due to increased interaction. Some dogs even get promoted to life indoors.

The example of FFF and the Coalition to Unchain Dogs has inspired other groups around the country, among them Freedom Fences (Anderson, S.C.), Unchain Charleston (S.C.), and Habitat for Hounds (Lansing, Mich.). More than 40 out-of-state requests for startup information have resulted in FFF issuing a manual and scheduling conference calls to mentor other groups.

FFF volunteers believe their work has improved the lives of many dogs and their families, says Peterson, who holds a full-time position as vice president of state affairs for The HSUS. Actually, her dual animal-caring roles—“at both a macro and a micro level”—give her “the best of both worlds,” she says. For instance, without guidance from The HSUS and the Coalition to Unchain Dogs, FFF would not have gotten off the ground, and Peterson would not have been able to assist Biaggi, a dog who spent 13 years on an 8-foot chain before FFF changed his life with a new fence. “That moment of gratitude—when we locked eyes and [Biaggi] leaned his head on my hand—will always stay with me.”

Janice Arenofsky is a Scottsdale, Ariz.-based freelance writer for national magazines.
Working Both Sides of the Law
Michigan county focuses on outreach as well as enforcement

When Jamie McAloon-Lampman began directing the animal control department and shelter in Michigan’s Ingham County in 2004, some people accused her of trying to run the operation “like a humane society.” That accusation—she recalls with a laugh—prompted her to reply, “You say that like it’s a bad thing.”

“We really are not your standard animal control, by any means,” McAloon-Lampman says, pointing to the county’s pet food banks, spay/neuter clinic, and outreach programs. She’s particularly excited about a new community outreach center in a Lansing neighborhood—an area that has been a source of complaints. The center, which was set to open in October, will assist local residents with everything from dog training and humane education to spay/neuter and low-cost vaccinations. “We really want to be proactive,” she explains. “Let’s stop it before we have to deal with it.”

A 27-year veteran of the animal welfare field, McAloon-Lampman believes that a humane approach to animal control doesn’t mean—as her skeptics feared—that you weaken law enforcement. Along with all other services, the county has increased its animal licensing by almost 30 percent, and doubled its prosecutions.

Jill Fritz, Michigan state director for The HSUS, says she’s seen both sides of McAloon-Lampman and her staff. After Ingham County animal control helped shutter a puppy mill in 2009, “I was just really impressed by the diligence of Jamie and her officers in really pursuing the case, and making sure that all the right charges were filed, and that this person was shut down,” Fritz says. And they’re also “a really wonderful part of the greater Lansing community,” Fritz adds—educating the public about cruelty, and encouraging adoptions and humane animal care.

McAloon-Lampman studied journalism at the University of Oklahoma and planned to become a reporter, but a job as a veterinary technician during college led her down a different path. Her own animals include two horses, two Labs, a Pekingese mix, and three cats. In the edited interview that follows, she discusses her career with Animal Sheltering associate editor James Hettinger.

Animal Sheltering: What are some of the big issues in your community, or anything you’re excited about, or frustrated by?
Jamie McAloon-Lampman: The frustration—and I think everyone experiences the same frustration—is [the animals] just keep coming.

We just got a grant from PetSmart to do free spay/neuter for dogs in that specific area [where] we’re doing the outreach [center], and we’ve gotten other grants to do cats. That message—spay/neuter, spay/neuter—it’s still a good message, and it does work, because we’ve seen a decline in the number of animals. We were taking in almost 7,000 animals when I came here seven years ago. Now we’re down to a little less than 4,000. That’s significant, especially when an economy is dumping animals on us left and right.

[Another frustration is] the neglect and the abuse. We do a lot of dogfighting cases. It’s amazing how many people say, “Oh, I didn’t know we had that here.”

How do you be proactive about that sort of thing?
You’ve got to have some well-trained officers, and you’ve got to educate the judges and the prosecutors. We’ve really made a lot of effort to work with the prosecutors, and we give them good cases.

You’ve got to feel that it’s important, and you’ve got to be passionate about it. We’re all passionate. I hire people for passion, not for experience. I can get them the experience, but I can’t give them that passion. They’ve got to believe that we’re gonna make a difference.

In the years you’ve been in the field, how would you say it’s changed or is changing now?
I think the commissioners and the public officials are recognizing that the citizens who vote don’t want dog pounds. They want humane shelters. That’s the biggest change that’s come into animal control, and I like it.

If you could wave a magic wand, what aspect of the animal welfare field would you most like to change?
I’d like to make it more of a priority in the community. I think it adds to quality of life in any community. Nobody wants to live in a community where there are [are] abused and abandoned animals wandering the streets, and nobody’s responding to it. I’d like to see it be recognized for the valuable service that it is, and I don’t know how you do that other than to toot your own horn, which is often what we do.
Let’s Have a Party

Got pits? Throw a party! That’s the approach taken by the Humane Society of Charlotte (HSC) in North Carolina, which held its third annual Adopt-A-Bull event in August.

The festival-style gathering serves as a celebration of the bully breeds, showcasing the many charms of pits and pit mixes in a fun setting, says Donna Canzano, the humane society’s vice president of development and community relations.

Held on the HSC’s grounds on a Saturday morning, this year’s party featured food vendors, tables manned by other animal welfare organizations, and of course Adopt-A-Bull volunteers walking the adoptable dogs.

In a new wrinkle this year, the event was preceded by a two-hour vaccine/wellness clinic. About a dozen owners took advantage of the $10 vaccines, and several of them agreed to get their dogs spayed or neutered, according to Canzano.

Altogether, about 75 people attended Adopt-A-Bull. Pre-event promotion resulted in four dogs getting adopted, and another got adopted after the event.

Think something similar might work for your organization? “Try it,” Canzano advises, “and get as much media as you can, because the media loves pit bull stories.” A local radio station did an on-site broadcast, and three local television stations covered the event.

Yes, the media sometimes focus on sensational, negative stories about pit bulls, Canzano says, but she adds that it’s possible to sway the coverage toward the great things about them. The day before Adopt-A-Bull, for example, Canzano appeared on a local TV morning show, accompanied by an adorable baby pit named Judge. (View the clip at foxcharlotte.com/rising/guests/Adopt-166531176.html.) In the coverage of the actual event, Canzano says, owners got a chance to talk about what they love about their pit bulls.

Canzano also got to shatter some stereotypes by walking around the event with an enormous pit named Corwin. People marveled at how friendly he is, prompting her to reply, “Yeah, they actually can be nice!”

She sees that message getting through to people. “They see that there are good people out there that want to adopt them as well,” Canzano says.

—James Hettinger

Baby, It’s Cold Outside

Thickened fur coats help feral cats weather winter. But it’s equally essential that the shelters constructed to protect feral cats are warm, dry, well-insulated, and appropriately sized to trap the cats’ body heat and warm up the shelter’s interior.

Straw is the best material to put in the shelter, because it allows cats to burrow (don’t use hay as a substitute for straw; it may look similar, but it can irritate noses and cause allergic reactions). Pillowcases loosely stuffed with packing peanuts and shredded newspaper also work. Straw and newspaper should be replaced if they’re moist or dirty. Pillowcases can be washed and restuffed. Avoid blankets, towels, and folded newspapers, which absorb body heat and chill cats lying on them.

If it’s really cold where you live, you can augment the interior insulations listed above by “wallpapering” the shelter’s inner walls and floor with Mylar. It reflects back body heat, so it’s OK for cats to lie on it.

If the privacy and security of the shelter won’t be compromised, place the shelter near the food to reduce the cats’ travel. You can also place two shelters, doorways facing each other, 2 feet apart, and create a canopy between them by securing a wide board from one roof to the other. Food and water will be protected under the canopy. A thick plastic water container that’s deep and wide provides better insulation than thin plastic or ceramic.

Canned food freezes quickly. But if shelters are well-insulated, you can put a bowl of moist food far from the doorway. Even if the food freezes, the cats’ body heat will defrost it when they hunker down in their shelter. Don’t put water bowls inside, though—a wet shelter would feel more like a refrigerator than a toasty haven.

There are some build-it-yourself and purchased options to prevent or delay drinking water from freezing; some of them can work for food, too.

Well-fed cats with adequate shelter can be safely trapped in winter. They’re less likely to be pregnant or nursing, kittens are rare, and you’ll beat the heat of kitten season.

See neighborhoodcats.org for more information on winter care for feral cats.

—Nancy Peterson

cats program manager, The HSUS
Under the Feather?
Evaluating and caring for incoming birds

If you get a guest from the avian world, whether he arrives as a surrender or a stray, the first thing to do is make sure he’s not sick or injured. Lost feathers or Extreme Fluffiness do not necessarily mean the bird is sick, but there are some major warning signs.

In the “Duh” category, a bird who is bleeding, vomiting, or lying prone on the cage floor should have you dialing an experienced vet, stat. More subtle signs of illness include labored breathing, dragging a wing or leg, or being unable to perch. If your visitor is displaying any of these symptoms, he needs to see a good Tweety Doc right away.

If none of these worrisome issues are present, give him some time to chill out while you take the time to do a little homework: What species is he, and what are the basic things that species will need to be healthy? Did the former owner provide any info on his needs and the diet he’s been eating? Is there a good avian rescue group in the area that might be able to provide specific care tips and eventually take him in?

While you wait for the high-flying cavalry to swoop in to assist, here are ways to ensure your bird will tweet only the best about the four-star lodging you’ve provided during his stay. Any handling of birds should be done using a gentle but firm grip (towels make easier and safer protection than gloves); if you’re moving your guest from one cage to another, close the doors and windows to eliminate any opportunities for him to pull a great escape.

Keep it quiet, please. House birds in a low-traffic area away from the sounds and sight of dogs, cats, snakes, etc. Keep cages high off the floor, and ideally partially covered and positioned against a wall to provide privacy. If possible, separate them from other birds as well (hey, you’re a human being, but that doesn’t mean you want strangers in your hotel room).

Peepin’ on the Ritz. Ideally, use stainless steel or powder-coated painted cages; never use iron, lead, or zinc—it would be like housing a human in a motel room with arsenic walls. Birds can chew through plastic and wood structures, so make sure the enclosures are chew-proof and away from electrical wires.

Provide room service. Your bird won’t care about sparkling or still, but he’ll need ready access to fresh water and a quality seed mix and pellets appropriate for his species at all times. You can offer tasty side dishes of grains, beans, veggies (raw or cooked), fruit, and nuts.

No Wi-Fi, but plenty of perches. Birds like to get high. Not that way—they like to perch and have a good view of the terrain. So hook up their temporary crib with multiple levels. As for the “room” itself, look for cages that’s rectangular, square and wide; not circular, narrow, or tall; birds should be able to move about comfortably, with bar spacing small enough so there is no risk of getting their heads stuck, or being able to flee the coop.

Help him dodge the draft. Unless you’re one of those people who never need a sweater, a comfortable room temperature for you will likely be comfy for your bird—but sudden shifts in heat can be stressful. Keep birds away from drafts coming from air conditioning and radiators, as well as any chemicals, aerosols, cleaners, Teflon fumes, tobacco, and other airborne contaminants.

One-star lodging. If your facility totally lacks bird caging, and your feathered friend didn’t arrive with his own, tanks, bins, crates, or kennels can be used for short-term (24 hours or less) emergency housing, until you can get him to better accommodations. But don’t be surprised if the bird sounds off on Yelp.

For more information on longer-term avian care needs, check out avianwelfare.org and animalsheltering.org.
STEREOTYPES ARE THE PITS.

I’m a good dog, a snuggler, a ball-fetcher.  
I’m a house-minder, a bed-warmer, a smiler.  
I like sunny days in the park, chew toys, and treats.  
I like to run and run and run and run and run.

And not once have I ever, ever been in a dogfight.

Like all dogs, I’ll be as good and loving 
as the people who call me their own.

ARE YOU GOOD ENOUGH FOR A DOG LIKE ME?
Mike Cassidy, director of public services for Jessamine County (Kentucky) is elated with his county’s new $720,000 animal shelter, which opened in July. Cassidy, who’s worked for the county for 13 years, wasn’t sure he’d ever get to see a modern building replace the old one, which he estimates was built 30-40 years ago. “We never thought we could get everybody on board to construct a new one. Even back then [when I started working for the county], we were saying, ‘How could we add onto this [one] to make it better?’” he says. No need to worry about add-ons now—the new shelter, at 10,000 square feet, is five times bigger, with the capacity to house 44 dogs and 22 cats. There are two separate wings—one for intake/stray animals, the other for adoptable pets—and properly sealed floors. Each wing has its own grooming station, and a room for food preparation and storage. There’s also a sick/isolation room for cats and dogs, which has its own air-handling system. Cats went from being housed in “a huge shed” with an air-conditioning window unit, to a room of their own with access to an outdoor enclosure. But the feature that has Cassidy the most jazzed is the new community/multifunction room, which the local Sam’s Club decked out with a smart TV, a laptop, iPads, and a surround-sound system. “I’m a big proponent of education, and we never have had a place where we could invite the public into our facility, and comfortably educate anybody. And that’s where it all starts,” he says.

In 2011, a new Enhanced Adoption Center opened inside a Boise PetSmart, thanks to a partnership between the Idaho Humane Society and PetSmart Charities. The 2,076-square-foot center will free up kennel space at the humane society’s main shelter, and provide a new venue for adoptable animals until they find homes. PetSmart Charities funded 100 percent of the build-out costs, and PetSmart is not charging the humane society—which will staff and run the center—any rent. The center can house more than 45 dogs and cats; about 20 pets are expected to be adopted from the site each week. “It’s in a really high-traffic area, right by the mall here in Boise, whereas our shelter is out behind the airport … there’s a lot of people coming through,” says Hannah Parpart, the humane society’s communications and outreach coordinator. The center’s upbeat design and retail-style atmosphere are a hit with visitors, too. “When you walk into a lobby, and you can see dogs frolicking and having such a great time, it sets the tone for a really positive experience.” Parpart says the center will allow Idaho Humane to increase its transfer program, taking in more pets from shelters with less visibility and lower adoption rates. PetSmart Charities has partnered with humane societies, animal control agencies, and animal welfare groups in seven states to open similar centers, helping find homes for more than 3,700 pets.
Something to Meow About

In June, Faithful to Felines, a cat rescue in Muskegon, Mich., had an open house to celebrate more than a year of work to renovate its recently purchased facility. Hundreds of people turned out to tour the site; the event was the culmination of efforts that started in December 2010, when the rescue bought the building. The move from a network of foster homes into the new facility was thanks to a large bequest from a local woman. “We really weren’t even aware that we were in her will … we had no idea what we were going to be getting. It could have been a hundred dollars, for all we knew,” Kellie Mink, the rescue’s president, says. The group soon received two checks totaling $150,000, and more funds followed—enough to buy two buildings and five acres of land outright, with more money left over. “Everything that we’ve done, we’ve done as economically as possible. We want to have a nest egg, in case something happens.” The facility, which can accommodate 100-125 cats, features nine rooms where cats can roam freely, a quarantine room, a sick room, an outdoor atrium, and a surgical unit for a veterinarian who visits once a week. The atrium has a little wooden bridge, which was donated, and volunteers painted a bright blue, fish-filled stream “running” underneath it. But the best feature? Every room in the building has a double-door closet, behind which are a sink, shelving, and cupboards—so food and cleaning supplies don’t have to be moved from room to room, eliminating a potential source of disease transmission (and making cat rooms a breeze to clean). It all adds up to a cat rescue that doesn’t look—or smell—the way the public might imagine.
Think Outside the Rink
Unconventional fundraiser on wheels scores in Springfield, Mo.

BY JIM BAKER

When you think of shelter or rescue fundraisers, events like galas, community dog walks, and grooming events probably come to mind—but roller derby? The idea emerged from a conversation between two skaters—Katie Ames and Madison Black—in the Springfield Queen City Roller Derby, a Missouri-based league with about 40 members. Ames is the manager of Castaway Animal Rescue Effort’s (CARE) Ozark adoption center.

“Each of our [roller derby] bouts, we pick a local charity, and we have raffles, we do some sort of thing for them,” Ames says. “We had a bout coming up in March, and [Madison] said, ‘I really wish we could do it for CARE.’ She kind of had the idea, and we talked about it, and I said, ‘Well, we’ve gotta make this happen.’”

Ames discussed the idea with her supervisor at CARE and Susan Venker, the shelter’s public relations coordinator, pitching it as a creative event that would benefit both organizations—garnering exposure for the league, and both funds and adoptions for CARE.

The suggestion by Ames caught Venker a little off guard. “My first reaction was a little hesitant, because I was like, ‘I’ve never even heard of doing something like this before, so what if it doesn’t go well?’”

But she recognized the hearts of gold behind the wheels of steel. “I’d never really seen roller derby before, but those girls are tough, and they have no problem shoving each other around in the rink. But they also have a really big soft spot for animals, so they wanted to do the fundraiser for us,” Venker says.

Everyone agreed to try it, and that’s how the March event (dubbed CARE for a Pounding, owing to the sport’s smashmouth reputation) came to be.

Ames and Black, who both skate on the Queen Bees team, and other league members asked area merchants to donate gift certificates to use as prizes in a raffle for the event. They also came up with a flier to advertise the bout. Venker sent a press release to local media, and talked to radio stations about the event. “A lot of times if I send out a press release, I don’t really get a response, but with this, I had like five different media interviews, which was awesome,” Venker says. She recalls doing four interviews before the event and one during the bout, and two TV stations showed up to cover the fundraiser.

“I wanted to just mesh two different worlds, if you will. And it worked!” says Ames, who’s known in the league as “Renegade Roxie.” (“Each person has a roller derby name; they kind of have a persona,” she says. “[Madison’s] roller derby name is ‘Zom B Bar B.’ She’s just like a 5-foot, tiny little girl, and she’s very Barbie-looking—it’s awesome.”)

All the efforts to get the word out paid off. The event attracted about 400 people, one of the league’s largest crowds ever. In addition to raising money through ticket sales, organizers asked people to bring either monetary donations or shelter supplies for CARE, and receive a raffle ticket in exchange. At the end of the evening, it took four cars to carry all the donated items back to CARE, including big bags of pet food, cat litter, treats, and cleaning supplies.

A beer garden enlivened the atmosphere, and at halftime, skaters circled the rink, cuddling some of the adoptable pets brought from CARE, talking to people about each one. Five pets were adopted that night, three of whom went home with skaters, and the event raised about $800 for CARE.

“It definitely exceeded my expectations. I think the Queen City Roller Derby wants to do this event again next year,” Venker says. “They’re a rough-and-tumble group, but that doesn’t mean that they don’t love animals, too.”
You’re helping us. We’re helping you. We’re all helping animals. Carry on!

Kudos & Thank Yous
Cooperative Efforts Free Hundreds of Dogs from Abuse, Neglect

It’s always a sad situation when places that portray themselves as havens for needy animals turn out to be anything but. That was the unfortunate case in July, when The HSUS’s Animal Rescue Team helped remove nearly 300 dogs, mostly pit bulls, from a facility called Spindletop Refuge in Willis, Texas. Assisting the Montgomery County Precinct 3 Constable and Montgomery County Animal Control, The HSUS team worked more than 20 hours straight, until 6 a.m. the next day, to transfer the dogs off the property and transport them to the emergency shelter.

A former employee had recently reported that 38 dogs died from heat exposure in one day, which allowed local law enforcement to take action. Almost all of the dogs were confined in crates. Dogs were sitting in their own waste, suffering from skin conditions and pressure sores, and some had muscle atrophy from not being able to move around. Volunteer veterinarians attended to animals in the greatest need and distress, and volunteers from the Houston Humane Society also helped out. The emergency shelter was staffed by HSUS staff and volunteers, Red Rover volunteers, and inmates provided by Montgomery County law enforcement. Animal Farm Foundation dove in to help, too.

Also in July, the Pennsylvania State Animal Response Team called in The HSUS to help rescue 185 Chihuahuas and two hounds from unsanitary conditions at an unlicensed kennel operating in Benton. The dogs, victims of an alleged hoarding operation, had serious eye, skin, and dental issues, and many were found dead. Responding to tips from the public, the Pennsylvania Department of Dog Law, cooperating with Pennsylvania State Police, served a search and seizure warrant at the private home of the property’s owners. The HSUS, along with other groups, helped arrange transport and emergency sheltering at an area farm-show complex, as well as placement of the dogs into 14 shelters throughout central Pennsylvania. Teams from Columbia, Dauphin, and Perry counties—part of the larger Pennsylvania State Animal Response Team—were also involved. There were too many groups helping to name them all here, but the Animal Rescue Team sends gratitude to all of you!

In August, The HSUS’s Animal Rescue Team helped authorities in investigations and raids on two separate suspected dogfighting operations in Kalamazoo, Mich. Kalamazoo County Animal Services and Enforcement led the raids, which resulted in the arrest of two alleged dogfighters and the seizure of 46 dogs, some of whom had scarring consistent with dogfighting. The HSUS and local authorities found suspected dogfighting paraphernalia, and areas for staged fights, on both properties. Aaron Winters, director of the Kalamazoo Humane Society, was also on the scene at the raids, and the president of the KHS board—Kristin Goodchild, who is also on the Michigan State Council of The HSUS—helped secure the location of the emergency shelter, and got the board to donate money toward air conditioning it. KHS works with KCASE to provide spay/neuter and humane education in the county.

Heads up!

The HSUS has launched a new online resource, Rescue Central, designed to provide all the information you and your rescue partners need to run the most effective and humane rescue organization possible—from the latest money-saving tips to expert advice on recruiting and retaining foster homes. Visit the site at animalsheltering.org/Rescue_Central.

In response to many inquiries The HSUS receives from people seeking help with feral cats, we’ve developed an online, user-friendly map of feral cat groups in the United States and Canada. Now advocates can get a good idea of what’s happening in their state or local area, which can help them when persuading their municipality to support TNR. Advocates can also contact local organizations for advice and support. More resources are also being added to humanesociety.org/feralcats, including PowerPoint presentations, release forms, letters to recruit veterinarians, and more.

Registration to attend The HSUS’s Animal Care Expo 2013 in Nashville will start in mid-December. More than 1,800 people from 40 countries participated in Expo 2012 in Las Vegas. To learn more, visit animalsheltering.org/expo.
Once Withering, Now Slithering

D.C. officers help rescue starving snake and convict former owner

BY JAMES HETTINGER

The case of the severely underweight snake raised some eyebrows, acknowledges Michael Triebwasser, a humane law officer for the D.C.-based Washington Humane Society (WHS).

As he investigated the situation and pursued a cruelty conviction against the snake's owner, people seemed a little surprised: Oh... a snake?

"It's something that we don't tend to see," he says, "but it's an animal as defined by D.C. law, just like any other animal, and deserving of protection under the law."

The case began last December when animal control officer Shawn Covington accompanied D.C. police on their search of a suspect's home. The search was unrelated to animal care, but the police requested help securing two dogs on the scene, Covington says.

After dealing with the dogs, Covington checked the home for other animals. In the bedroom, he discovered a small aquarium containing a malnourished, 2-foot blood python; the animal wasn’t moving and appeared to be having trouble shedding her skin—a sign of dehydration. "At first when I looked at it, I thought the snake was deceased," Covington recalls.

The top of the aquarium was covered with a layer of plastic that prevented air flow, he adds. When he removed the cover and picked up the snake, she still didn’t move. Then, "As I’m taking it out of the cage, it just barely moved its head a little bit." He took the snake to WHS’s animal care and control facility to assess and document her condition.

Triebwasser was called in and found that the snake bore little resemblance to the muscular creatures you might find on a nature trail. "This was just literally like a sack of bones," he recalls. "You could see just about every rib. Its spine was this really prominent ridge along its back."

WHS impounded the snake soon after. While the shelter is not designed to handle snakes, staff set up a large tank in an office, equipped with a heating lamp, substrate logs to help the animal remove her skin by slithering around, and a pool of water large enough for her to submerge her entire body. WHS’s medical director tasked Triebwasser with trying to feed the snake and giving her baths twice a day—a new experience for him; his previous snake-handling experience was limited to touching one at a zoo.
Triebwasser also interviewed the snake’s owner, who wasn’t home when police conducted their search, but visited WHS about a week later, asking for his snake back. He told Triebwasser that the animal had suddenly started losing weight and developing mouth sores about seven months earlier. The owner claimed he had contacted a veterinary technician friend of his, who advised him to put peroxide on the sores, which he had done.

The owner said he had owned snakes before and appeared to be knowledgeable about their needs, but when Triebwasser repeatedly asked him if he had sought veterinary care, he said no, citing a lack of money. The fact that the owner had gone about seven months without getting veterinary help for a sick, underweight snake amounted to a major husbandry problem, Triebwasser says, noting that there are resources available to low-income pet owners.

Triebwasser wasn’t able to verify that the owner had even spoken to his vet tech friend, which in any event wouldn’t have qualified as vet care. WHS declined to return the snake to the owner, instead obtaining an arrest warrant on one misdemeanor count of cruelty to animals for failing to provide veterinary care.

In May, a D.C. Superior Court judge found the owner guilty, sentencing him to a 30-day suspended jail sentence, six months on probation, and 24 hours of community service.

WHS transferred the snake to a reptile rescue facility in Maryland.

The cruelty conviction, Triebwasser’s first, was especially rewarding because it came for a snake, he says. Prosecutors see all kinds of criminal cases, he notes, so one involving an animal, particularly an animal that isn’t a dog or a cat, “might not be the first thing that they really jump on.” The snake made the case unusual, but gathering evidence, talking to veterinarians, investigating people’s stories, and presenting information to U.S. attorneys are among his typical daily activities, he says.

The legal process dragged on from December to May, and so much was out of his hands, but Triebwasser says the outcome was worth the wait and the uncertainty. “Knowing that you saw something wrong, you followed up, you did your job well, and someone was held accountable for a crime that they committed is a really good feeling.”

Humane law officer Michael Triebwasser notes that he typically deals with cats and dogs, but other animals—including snakes—are equally deserving of protection.
By the numbers

Poppet didn’t know she was about to become a celebrity. All she knew was that she hadn’t had anything to eat or drink since midnight. On June 7, the 6-month-old Siamese-mix kitten was the 10,000th pet to be altered by WeSNIP, a nonprofit spay/neuter clinic in Bellingham, Wash., that provides low-cost and no-cost surgeries to pet owners in financial need. WeSNIP—the Whatcom Education, Spay & Neuter Impact Program—has been serving residents of Whatcom and Skagit counties since 2008, when veterinarian Karen Mueller began doing surgeries in a mobile operating suite dubbed the Spay Station. “The comfort level [was] zero,” says Chris Haulgren, a WeSNIP board member. “It was kind of like car camping.” The Spay Station was retired in 2010, and today spays and neuters are performed in a facility shared with an animal emergency care clinic to cut costs. Funded entirely by grants, fundraising events, and individual donors, WeSNIP has also been expanding its trap-neuter-return work to help control feral cat populations in rural areas. The impact of the organization’s work is evident at the Whatcom County Humane Society, which reports a 79 percent decrease in cats and 82 percent decrease in dogs euthanized for lack of space since WeSNIP has been in business.

Semper fido

May 25 was a big day for a big dog at the Humane Society of Huron Valley in Ann Arbor, Mich. Magoo, a 7-year-old Newfoundland-Great Dane mix, answered the call of duty to become the first canine adopted at the shelter though the national Pets for Patriots program. Pets for Patriots was created to find homes for harder-to-place animals with active or retired members of the U.S. military, who get a reduced adoption fee and discounts on veterinary care and supplies for the life of their pet. Magoo entered the shelter in October 2011 as a cruelty case, drastically underweight at 102 pounds; good nutrition and TLC quickly brought him up to a healthy 135 pounds. His laid-back personality attracted a lot of attention, but his size was problematic for those who felt they didn’t have enough space for him or worried about the cost of feeding him, says Deb Kern, Huron Valley’s marketing director. Finally, Magoo caught the eye of Peter Ayers, a U.S. Marine who was looking for a companion for his three young children. The Ayerses were taken with Magoo’s goofy, playful spirit, and proceeded to commission him for active duty in their household. For more information on Pets for Patriots, visit petsforpatriots.org.

A doggone good deal

Here’s a deal that gives as good as it gets: Buy a bag of FreeHand’s new super-premium dog food, and the company—founded expressly to help homeless pooches—will give one to an animal shelter or rescue group. FreeHand is sold through retailers, veterinarians, pet-service providers, and the company’s website, where customers can choose which organization they would like their purchase to benefit. “We’re elated by the response we’ve gotten so far,” says founder and managing director Tom Bagamane. The holistic food line launched in June in Indianapolis, Dallas/Fort Worth, and Southern California; a month later more than 12,000 pounds of free kibble was delivered to rescue organizations in those areas. To cut down on overhead and devote more dollars to rescue, FreeHand does minimal media advertising, relying instead on its FreeHand Corps of volunteers to spread the word about the food and the donation program. For more information, go to lendafreehand.com.
Magna cum canine

Give your organization a little C.L.A.S.S. this season. The Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT) is offering its popular Canine Life and Social Skills program free of charge to animal shelters and rescue groups to help dogs successfully transition into new homes. Adapted for use in shelters, the positive reinforcement training course keeps dogs active and engaged while they await adoption and gives them the skills they need to become well-adjusted family members. The shelter program is designed to take the burden off shelter staff by training volunteers to work with the animals using C.L.A.S.S. techniques. “[The dogs] learn basic life skills, like how to sit, stay, walk on a leash, go in a crate, give up a toy, things to help them fit in and be a good member of society,” says Mychelle Blake, president of APDT. Pooches who pass evaluation receive their “B.A.” and are touted as adoptable on the C.L.A.S.S. website. “To be able to say that a dog has been certified is a great marketing tool for shelters” says Blake. To find out how to bring C.L.A.S.S. to your group, go to mydoghasclass.com/shelters.

When the spirit moves you

Catster.com reports that when a family in Marin, Calif., felt uncomfortable in their house this past spring, they did what any of us would do: They called a psychic house cleaner. Sheldon Norberg, who holds a degree in psycho-spiritual healing from San Francisco State University, knew immediately what was wrong: The house had been sited incorrectly on the lot and needed to be adjusted. However, as this could not be done physically, Norberg energetically adjusted the house on the ethereal plane, giving the house a quarter-turn so it would psychically face another direction. Problem solved. Until the next day, when the client called to say that his cat was behaving strangely, refusing to leave the downstairs study and pooping in the corner. Norberg realized that he had neglected to inform the cat about the energetic realignment—the poor thing couldn’t find the “new” position of his cat door (which was right in front of him) and felt trapped in the house. Norberg made a second trip to the home to explain the situation to the cat, assuring him that the cat door was still there, although it felt like it was in a different place.