

FOCUS ON

Our Gwinnett's Animal Shelter: Sharing a doggone good turnaround tale

– February 3, 2014



Volunteers provide lots of help with caring for animals in the shelter.

Bark less, wag more is the new philosophy at the Gwinnett Animal Welfare and Enforcement Services shelter on Winder Highway in Lawrenceville. Abandoned and lost animals in unincorporated Gwinnett have long been a responsibility of the Gwinnett Police department. But now, they're getting new love and respect.

The number of animals "put down" or euthanized at the shelter has dropped dramatically from 7,850 in 2009 to just 2,467 in 2013. And there's a new emphasis on "saving" animals through adoptions, rescues, and pets reclaimed by owners.

Shelter staff is spreading their infectious enthusiasm by organizing a very successful volunteer program, a continuing partnership with Homeless Pet Clubs, an improved rescue group outreach program, classes for pets and owners, public education efforts, and many more adoption events both at the shelter and in the community.

They're now holding events like a Shot Clinic, a Spay and Neuter Clinic, and an Itty Bitty Kitties program where volunteers care for very young kittens until they're old enough to find their forever homes. That program saved the lives of about 600 kittens last year.

The Barn Cat program has been another success. It spays and neuters cats who grew up in the wild, then puts them to work providing natural pest control at farms and stables with help from the Planned Pethood organization.

When tornadoes hit Oklahoma last May, the shelter staged a pet food drive to help feed the suddenly

homeless pets there. Hoping to fill a small trailer, they kept the shelter open all weekend to collect donations. Gwinnett residents responded with 17 tons of food and pet supplies. A trucking company volunteered to haul it to the appropriately named city of Moore, Oklahoma. "I was floored at the outpouring from so many people in such a short amount of time," shelter manager Sgt. Chip Moore said. "We were able to fill two tractor trailers in just four days."



Donations to the animal shelter in Moore, Oklahoma totaled 17 tons, enough to fill two tractor trailers.

Sgt. Moore was named interim manager of the shelter in March 2012, while two national searches were conducted for a permanent manager. His resume showed lots of experience chasing robbers, burglars, and drug dealers but nothing that prepared him for herding cats.

He jumped right into the driver's seat and rewrote the operating procedures, first for field operations, then for the kennels. His spirit and energy were just what the shelter needed. But if

you ask him, he'd say, "It's all because of the staff and volunteers who work here. They are passionate about what they do, and our numbers are a true reflection of their efforts."

He adopted three dogs and two cats himself. County officials removed the word Interim from his title last year.

In November, the shelter joined the Gwinnett CAN Challenge—a people-food drive initiated by The Holtkamp Family Foundation to raise awareness of local food banks. They offered \$10 off shelter fees for adoptions, reclaims, or rescues to anyone who brought in five items from a list of critically needed supplies before the end of the year. Surprise! That program has now been extended through all of 2014.



Gwinnett was the only shelter in Georgia chosen to participate in the ASPCA Rachel Ray \$100K Challenge

The shelter has been doing so well that it was recently selected to compete against 50 animal shelters across America in the 2014 ASPCA Rachel Ray \$100K challenge. Throughout the months of June, July, and August of this year, the shelters must beat their 2013 numbers to save the most dogs, cats, puppies, and kittens. Winners receive up to \$600,000 in grants, with the grand prize of \$100,000 to the top winner. More details about the challenge are forthcoming, so be on the lookout to find out how you can help the Gwinnett Animal and Enforcement Center take the top prize!

In the meantime, check out their website for more information, which includes pictures of adoptable dogs and cats, at www.gwinnettanimalcontrol.com.