

WESTERN NEW YORK Family

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Strengthening
FAMILY
Connections

Raising A
Politically
Savvy
Teen

 Gifts
Galore

INTERVIEW:
Congressman
Brian Higgins

The Family Pet – A Special Section

Adopting A Furry Family Member from the SPCA

When a family considers adopting a pet from the SPCA, many things might worry them. Is it like buying a used car — will I just be inheriting somebody else's problems? When I go there to look at the animals, will it break my heart? Will I see row after row of cages with sad little creatures, begging me to take them home?

It comes as a great relief to many to find that it's anything but that. The SPCA volunteers and staff love animals, and take a very sincere interest when matching up people with pets. When you begin to take those first steps, look into the process, and visit a shelter, you'll see that they're bright, cheerful places with happy animals.

The pets in their care aren't just walked once a day and left to languish, but are rather set on a well thought-out training program, working with several volunteers during the course of the day, on such areas as behaviors and obedience, etc. They also receive special one-on-one time for love and cuddles.

The First Step: Which Pet is Right for You?

The first step the SPCA itself will want you to take is to decide which pet is right for you. How will it fit into your family lifestyle? If the animal will be left alone for 8-10 hours a day, a rambunctious little puppy probably isn't the best bet for you. The volunteers can pair you up with a more mature dog that won't mind the quiet time alone, or a cat that prefers its own space anyway.

If you've got very young children, and very little time at all to devote to your pet's care, you might want a gerbil or a hamster that require very little maintenance, and are still great fun and a great way to teach your children those first lessons about responsibility.

Gina Browning of the SPCA Serving Erie County says, "Sometimes people come in, thinking 'how are we ever going to decide?' Once they start going through it with us, though, all of a sudden, what they're looking for becomes more clear."



by Terri Parsell Hilmey

The SPCA has a special "Meet Your Match" program for dogs, which is an evaluation process that both the pets and the owners go through. Each animal is taken through a series of games and play, and is assessed in terms of their activity level, how they greet people, what degree of attention they need, etc. The dogs are then designated as purple (laid back), orange (average), or green (very active).

When people come in, looking for their perfect match, they're also asked a series of questions about their lifestyle, and their expectations for their future pet.

Then the owners are also assigned a color, too, and are introduced to a series of animals whose color matches theirs.

"It's a great way for people to find exactly what they're looking for," says Stephanie Hall, Adoptions Supervisor, "That way, not only will they fall in love with the animal's appearance, they'll also find a dog that fits into their home very well. For instance, we have seniors come in, who are looking for a dog with a little bit of maturity, who won't chew up their shoes, or mess on the carpet. But they're also going to be home with the animal all day, so they can accommodate a dog that likes a lot of company. It's wonderful for us when a great match comes together."

What Goes On Behind the Scenes?

The SPCA takes their responsibility to the animals in their charge very seriously. They have implemented an elaborate animal enrichment program, which identifies when animals in their shelters are under stress. They can identify certain behaviors that show that an animal is having a bad experience, and they can implement very definite training techniques, including play, cuddling and soft talking, to improve the animal's enjoyment level, and also their health. This is all worked in together with an individualized plan for each animal, to prepare them for adoption into a good home.

Preparing Your Pet for You

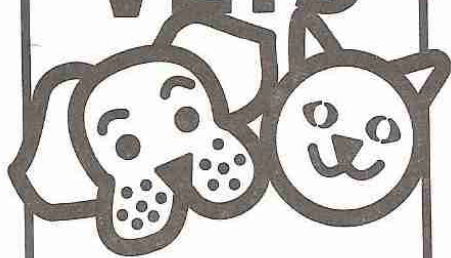
Once you've decided on that special little creature that you'd like to make a part of your family, the SPCA will spay and neuter the animal for you (this is mandatory for dogs, cats and rabbits). They will also provide the animal's first set of vaccinations, a dose of Advantage Flea Control, a Feline Leukemia & FIV Test for cats, free microchip identification for dogs and cats, 30 days of free veterinary insurance, and your pet's first physical examination at the Niagara Frontier Veterinary Society veterinarian of your choice. For puppies 20 weeks and under, they will also provide four "Puppergarten" classes, to help your fuzzy little critter to become a good canine citizen.

Charges for adoption can range from nominal prices for smaller animals like rabbits and gerbils, to up to \$185 for a new puppy 20 weeks old or younger. Obviously, any further donations are gratefully accepted, to allow them to continue their wonderful work in taking care of our animal friends.

After Your Pet Goes Home

Once your pet comes home with you, you will have received information about taking proper care of that pet, some assistance and information regarding scheduled veterinary visits, proper feeding and grooming, etc. And you'll know that you've been part of a special process that made a furry little critter into a member of your family.

PETS NEED VETS



Pets should have an annual checkup with your veterinarian, your other family doctor.



For a list of Niagara Frontier Veterinary Society members and a vet in your neighborhood, see our website at www.nfvs.us

■ Pet Identification Chips continued

their time to perform the procedures. He says the group is currently in the process of organizing their next clinic which he plans to hold at the Erie County SPCA facility in Tonawanda, sometime before Thanksgiving. Sontag says that an added benefit to the microchip is the ability to protect your dog should they be injured while loose.

Many programs offer insurance for the animal and that information can be looked up by the vet if a chipped animal is brought in, Sontag explains. "If a dog comes in with a compound fracture most vets aren't going to perform a \$3,000 surgery if they think they won't get paid." To that end, a vet's ability to scan a chipped animal may lead to faster treatment of your lost dog.

Asked what she would say to those pet owners still not convinced they should invest in an identification chip for their four-legged friend, SPCA's Carr shares a remarkable story of a reunion made possible thanks to a dog who had an id chip.

Charissa Solberg of Niagara Falls lost her toy fox terrier, Duke in October 2006.

Two years later Duke was brought into a local shelter as a stray and scanned for an id chip — Solberg's information came up. It was a miraculous reunion that Carr says shows the value of the chips. She calls the heartwarming story of Solberg and Duke "a relief," and says it is a great success story for the SPCA and should serve as an example for pet owners of the value of an id chip.

"People need to realize, there is no central registry to coordinate between all of the different animal control officers and shelters. If your pet gets loose how will you know where to even begin to go or who to call. The id chip greatly increases the chance you will be reunited with your pet."

For more information about adopting a pet contact the Erie County SPCA at 716-875-7360 or visit their website www.yourspca.org. To learn more about the organization Buffalo CAN visit their website www.bflocan.org.

Matt Chandler is a freelance writer from Blasdell, New York.

Pet-iquette – Your Responsibilities as a Pet-Owner

by Terri Parsell Hilmey

Just because you love your pet; feed them, and take care of them, your responsibilities as a pet-owner aren't finished. You also have a responsibility to your neighbors for your pet's behavior.

Your neighbors should either adore your pet, or not be aware that you have a pet at all. You have no right to a pet if that pet is an annoyance to your neighbors.

To keep the peace, and make sure that your neighbors love your pet as much as you do:

■ Clean up after your pet. If you've got a dog, you've got to walk your dog once or twice or even more a day, and bring a little baggie along with you for his mess. If you've got a cat that you allow outdoors, be sure that your cat is not leaving his mess in your neighbor's yard. If he is, you've got to keep him indoors and use a cat box.

■ If you've got a dog, your neigh-

bors should never have to hear that dog bark. Take your dog to obedience classes, keep him indoors, get a collar that releases a harmless citrus-y smell when your dog barks (which they don't like), or do whatever you have to do to make sure that the peace of your neighborhood is maintained.

■ You can't have more pets than the law allows. Many municipalities have laws that restrict how many of each type of animal may live in a home. But, you shouldn't need the local government to explain this common-sense rule to you. Don't have more pets than you can properly care for.

■ Have your pets spayed or neutered. Unless you're a properly-licensed and zoned pet breeder, your animals should not be capable of reproducing — especially if you allow them outside where they may have ac-

cess to other people's pets. Pets who are not spayed or neutered tend to be more aggressive. Male cats especially can create nasty messes and smells, and can clearly bring more unwanted animals into the world.

■ Keep your pet's inoculations up-to-date. A pet that hasn't been vaccinated, or that hasn't been treated for pests like fleas and lice, can bring disease to a neighborhood. Make sure that your pet is healthy, for his sake, as well as the sake of your neighborhood.

