

animal welfare matters

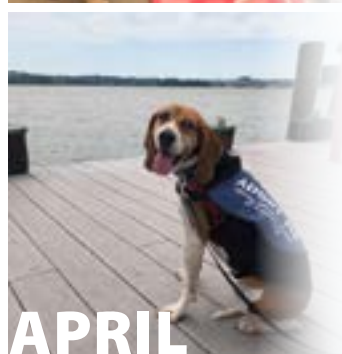


Helping Animals and the Community All Year Round

JANUARY

JANUARY 2019

In January, the federal government furlough meant more Alexandria residents were having to decide between paying bills and feeding their pets, but the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria (AWLA) always works to help pets stay in a loving home, and we made sure that news of our [Pet Pantry](#) — offering pet food and supplies to owners, no questions asked — was shared far and wide. We also saw record food donations from our community, which was looking for a way to help a neighbor in need.



APRIL

APRIL 2019

The AWLA took part in the Humane Society of the United States' new [Shelter Ally Project](#), bringing animals from regions with lower adoption rates, both in Virginia and across the country, to areas like Alexandria, where there are more animal-lovers seeking new pets than we take in from our jurisdiction alone. Among the dogs and cats transferred was Roxie, a 6-year-old hound who had lived for nearly 13 months at the Pittsylvania Pet Center in Virginia and who was adopted in July. (See her *Happy Tails* story on page 6.)



JULY

JULY 2019

Some animals are surrendered to us when their owners can no longer care for what seem like overwhelming medical needs, but often, we are able to give these animals a second chance. With the support of our generous community, a dog named [Noel](#), who began her stay with us in April with painful cataracts and suffering from seizures, received the treatment she needed, and she headed home with a family who would help her manage her senior medical needs. (Photos courtesy of AWLA Animal Care Team and Dirty Paw Photography.)



OCTOBER

OCTOBER 2019

Because of the support of our community, the AWLA has the resources to give animals the time they need to meet their future families, and for Annie that was 398 days. She was known around the shelter for her sweet personality, silly moments and [learning how to give high fives](#) to her friends, but because she could easily become overwhelmed in a busy household, had a hard time finding the right fit. But in October, Annie gave a high five to her new family and she hasn't looked back since!



NOVEMBER

NOVEMBER 2019

Starting each spring, "Kitten Season" is the time of year when shelters see a flood of kittens, some who come to us as orphans or others with their mothers, all needing shelter and care. [Mrs. Potts](#) was one of the last kittens of last year's kitten season, having been rescued from a pothole on Eisenhower Avenue by passersby who saw she needed their help. After recovering and then thriving in one of our foster's homes, Mrs. Potts was adopted in November, and now she has a loving family to call her own. ❤️



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 AlexandriaAnimals.org

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Hours of Operation

Monday 9:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.
 Tuesday 9:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.
 Wednesday CLOSED
 Thursday 9:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.
 Friday 9:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.
 Saturday 11:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
 Sunday 11:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Adoptable animals are available for viewing beginning at noon and online at AlexandriaAnimals.org.

Letter from the Executive Director From the Desk of Stella Hanly

2019 was a year of change for the AWLA. As you may have heard, Megan Webb, who had been Executive Director since 2013, resigned her position this fall. Under Megan’s leadership, the AWLA made so many advances, pushing us to the forefront of animal sheltering in the region. With the support of the AWLA team and the community, we drastically reduced euthanasia and decreased the average length-of-stay per animal, helping more pets find homes. We expanded our community by tripling the size of our volunteer and foster programs, and taking in even more animals from less advantaged areas so they might have a greater chance of finding a family. And we launched several community-based support programs, including Animeals, Free In-Neighborhood Vaccination and Pet Care Fairs and more flexible community Spay/Neuter program.

I have worked alongside Megan since 2015, first as Community Programs Liaison, then Director of Community Engagement, and finally as the Chief Operating Officer beginning in early 2018. When Megan had to take some time away from the shelter starting in October 2018, she asked me to serve as Acting Executive Director in her absence, and after Megan announced her resignation, the AWLA Board of Directors appointed me officially to the role. It is with great honor that I accepted this position, and I look forward to continuing this great work with the support of the AWLA community.

Expanding upon these efforts, as the new [Executive Director](#), my priority is for the AWLA to become an even greater resource for our community. To help achieve this goal, in late 2019 we created a new department focused solely on “owned” animals in the community and the people who love them. This Community Programs department, led by 12-year AWLA employee Joanna Fortin, will help to ensure pets owners who need a little assistance can access the resources they need to keep their pets in a loving home. We will be working to expand our Animeals program (where, in partnership with Senior Services of Alexandria, we provide pet food to seniors who participate in the “Meals on Wheels” program) to create Pet Pantries in neighborhoods where they are needed most; to strengthen our partnership with ALIVE! so we can distribute pet food and supplies at their food bank; to continue our relationship with the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority to host bi-annual vaccine and Pet



AWLA Executive Director Stella Hanly

Care Fairs; and to broaden our Crisis Care program to provide safe housing for the animals whose owners are going through a temporary crisis such as hospitalization or homelessness. The ultimate goal of these programs is to keep animals with their families and out of the shelter, which is beneficial to both pets and people in our community.

And we hope to offer even more to our community right here at the Vola Lawson Animal Shelter! Starting early in 2020, we have many fun and family-focused events on the schedule: From “Pawjama” movie nights to “Mindful Meow Meditation” to “Paint Your Pet,” there’s something for every animal lover in the family. We will be offering more Humane Education opportunities, including Teen Service Nights and a Humane Education lecture series. We want the AWLA to be welcoming and enjoyable, and we invite any and all guests whether you are looking for a new pet or just a fun place to visit and learn.

Great changes are ahead in 2020, and I am very excited about the future for Alexandria’s Animals! And to everyone who supports us in these efforts, we thank you; we couldn’t do it without you! ❤️



A girl and her pets wait in line for care.



A dog visits with volunteer veterinarians.



A dog has her nails trimmed by AWLA staff.

AWLA Alumni Leading Lives of Adventure and Service

If you've seen the cover of the AWLA's 2020 photo calendar, you'll recognize the adorable face of the cattle dog named Abby who adorns the cover. She was the top vote-getter in last year's calendar contest and will be Alexandria's Animal of the Year for 2020.

But Abby might as well have a second title: Therapy Dog of the Year. Adopted as a puppy five years ago by Diana and Nick Gritti of Alexandria, Abby had arrived at the Vola Lawson Animal Shelter through a special relationship with Potomac Highlands Animal Rescue, based in West Virginia.

Abby, then known as Ladybug, was the last of her litter of puppies to be adopted from the shelter. "She was a bitty puppy, sitting there in a huge kennel, looking at us with her dark eyes," recalls Diana Gritti. "We just fell in love with her."

The Grittis soon realized they had brought home a very smart, very sensitive dog, one that seemed to understand exactly what people were saying, even full sentences. Abby was also open to learning from the Grittis' other dog, an older miniature pinscher named Fitch, and became quite protective of him. "If I scold Fitch, Abby steps between the two of us," Gritti says.

Abby's greatest talent emerged at around age one, when Gritti's daughter needed consolation after breaking off her engagement to be married. "My daughter just lay on the couch for three days, distraught, and Abby lay beside her with her head on her chest and would not leave her. My daughter suggested she might have a talent for therapy."

Abby has now become an official therapy dog through the People Animals Love program, earning her American Kennel Club therapy dog badge after more than 80 visits to local nursing homes. Her niche, Gritti says, is engaging residents of the facilities' memory units, where people receive care for dementia. For residents who express interest in her visits, Abby stands on her hind legs and places her front paws on the arm of their wheelchairs, allowing the residents to pet her. "It's amazing — some of the people don't talk or move until they see a dog and then they reach out and become verbal," Gritti said.

"At first when we would go to the homes, I think Abby was doing it to please me. She would often look up at me for approval," Gritti said. "But now, when I get her bandana out before a therapy session, she gets very excited and she is a whole different Abby. She seems to really enjoy it."

Abby is just one of several AWLA alumni to find adventure after their time at the shelter. A Belgian Malinois name Zara joined the Alexandria Police Department six years ago, and a Belgian shepherd called Kahn went to work for the D.C. Central Detention Facility. Another AWLA canine alumna named Katie is now the official animal-in-residence of Sunrise at Mount Vernon senior living community.

Katie, thought to be an Australian shepherd/border collie mix, was introduced to Hannah Drexler of Sunrise when she stopped at the shelter about a year ago, looking for a new pet who could visit with the residents of the senior living center. The AWLA staff suggested Katie.

(continued on page 4)



Abby, Alexandria's 2020 Animal of the Year

Shelley Castle Photography



Abby loves to play but also is a dedicated therapy dog.

Shelley Castle Photography

Where the Cool Cats Can Be Found

What's the most happening joint in all of Alexandria? Kicking off the new decade in style, the AWLA is sure to be the place that everyone's talking about. Whether it's the upcoming redesign of our community spaces or our brand new Friday Night Fun events, we hope you'll stop by to be a part of our renewed — and revived — AWLA community. Check out "First Friday Family Fun Nights," offering kids and adults alike the chance to learn some amazing training skills and take on some animal-themed crafts. Learn more and register at [AlexandriaAnimals.org/FamilyFun](https://alexandrianimals.org/familyfun). Or if you're looking for something that skews a little older, join us for our 18+ Adult Nights Out at the AWLA series, pairing fun animal-focused activities and art skills at the end of each month. Find more information at [AlexandriaAnimals.org/AdultNights](https://alexandrianimals.org/adultnights). And while you're stopping by, make time to check out our new animal-themed decor, with new elements rolling out all year long, and of course, our adorable adoptables. This year, the AWLA is going to be the place to be. We hope to see you here!





Patty Bragg

Katie enjoys a greeting from a Sunrise resident.



Paul Taylor

Ranger's window on the world, his favorite spot in the Taylors' camper

(continued from page 3) A mellow 13-year-old, Katie fit in with the residents right away, Drexler said, and now has free run of the building, sleeping in the memory care “neighborhood” at night. Drexler and her assistant, Patty Bragg, take turns feeding and walking Katie during the day.

Katie spends much of her days on the center’s first floor but has learned how to take the elevator to the activity room on the second floor, said Drexler, who is Activities and Volunteer Coordinator. “When she wants to go back downstairs, she just waits for someone to come along and press the elevator button,” she said. “She’s really queen of this building.”

Drexler says that Katie is drawn to the residents and that they feel just as strongly about her. “They’ll ask, ‘Where’s my dog?’ when they don’t see her in their hall,” Drexler recalls. “She’s just the happiest dog. She always has a smile on her face.”

A three-year-old long-haired, orange cat named Ranger is having his own kind of adventures as the ideal travel companion for his people, Paul and Carolyn Taylor of Woodbridge. Ranger had been returned to the shelter by previous owners who said he was mischievous and had a habit of chewing on wires. But the Taylors couldn’t get him out of their minds after meeting him at the AWLA in May 2019, even though they had been seeking a kitten. It was his relaxed, friendly demeanor that attracted them, Paul Taylor said, and the couple’s two sons agreed. They adopted him.

They quickly trained Ranger to wear a harness and walk with a leash, and they were soon on the road with him in their RV camper — first short trips to Harpers Ferry and northern Pennsylvania and then a cross-country journey to San Diego. Ranger continued his mellow ways as they traveled those thousands of miles, lying quietly in his carrier until their evening stops, when he emerged to take in the sights out of the camper windows.

“We have absolutely loved Ranger,” Taylor said. “He is a bit mischievous, but we haven’t seen any destructive behavior. We’re happy we were able to take this wonderful cat and give him a home. He’s an important part of our lives.” ❤️

The FAQs on QCDs



A lot of people worry about not saving enough for retirement, but what do you do when the opposite is the case? If you realized that you might be a Super Saver, squirreling away more funds than you may need, you may be required to make retirement withdrawals that could cause you to pay more on taxes or even increase your Medicare premiums. But you can limit these oversaving penalties — and help animals in need — with a Qualified Charitable Distribution, or QCD.

A QCD is a tax strategy available if you are at least 70½ years old and have a traditional or inherited IRA. With a QCD, qualified individuals can distribute up to \$100,000/year directly from an IRA to a 501(c)(3) nonprofit with no federal income tax consequences. Since the distribution goes straight to the charity, it is not considered taxable income to the donor.

How Does It Work?

A QCD results in an otherwise taxable IRA distribution not being included in your taxable income. When your Required Minimum Distribution goes directly to a qualified charity instead of into your bank account, the distribution is not included in your Adjusted Gross Income. Using this strategy can lower your income and may decrease the tax you pay on your Social Security income or Medicare premiums. It could also impact whether or how much you owe for the Medicare surtax.

As a result of new tax laws, the number of taxpayers not itemizing their taxes has increased significantly. But even if you are not able to get tax benefits from ordinary donations, you can still use QCDs to see a tax benefit from your philanthropic giving while improving the lives of animals across your community.

For more information on whether a QCD is right for you, and how you can help animals across the community while decreasing your own tax penalties, please contact your financial planner and ask how you can make a Qualified Charitable Distribution to the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria. ❤️

Thanks to Laurie J. Blackburn of the Caudron Megary Blackburn Wealth Management Group of Wells Fargo Advisors for sharing her expertise on Qualified Charitable Distributions.

Recognizing Our Supporters

Volunteer Has a Soft Touch with Felines

AWLA volunteer Jodi Horton loves cats and kittens so much that she regularly opens the doors of her Springfield townhouse to felines in need of special attention. Never mind that she already has four cats of her own.

So far Horton has hosted more than 30 cats and kittens for the shelter: some of them kittens too young for the shelter to adopt out, others cats with medical problems requiring the quiet of a home and hands-on treatment. Many of the cats are considered long-term fosters, staying with Horton for months rather than days or weeks.

One of Horton's biggest challenges over the years was a black-and-white, short-haired cat with a severely injured back paw. Surrendered to the shelter by her owners, Luna faced amputation and a long recovery. Horton hesitated to take her, worrying that her home's multiple flights of stairs might be difficult for a cat missing a leg. "Going forward, I had to make sure she was healing properly and help her learn to get around on three legs," Horton recalled. "But she adapted so quickly that by the second day, she had jumped from the floor to the bed -- and also was climbing the stairs."

About 500 animals spent time in AWLA-assisted foster homes in 2019, for a variety of reasons, including those who may need a little extra medical attention, very young animals and pets needing special socialization or behavioral training.

"Jodi is the foster and volunteer who will always raise her hand to help, no matter the challenge," said the AWLA's Manager of Volunteers and Community Events, Echo Keif. "Whether it's tiny kittens needing treatment for ringworm or a senior cat in need of extra TLC and daily subcutaneous fluids, Jodi can and will help them. What's extra special about Jodi is her genuine compassion for animals and people. She is a true lifesaver!"

Horton started volunteering at the AWLA more than five years ago, helping to socialize cats in the shelter cat room and providing administrative support. She also assisted in transporting injured or sick animals to wildlife rehabilitators, one of them a tiny bat in a box that she drove to a Northern Virginia home for help. "I got to stay and observe the rehabber at work for a few minutes," she said. "It's part of a whole system of people doing their part to help animals."

Horton, who is retired from the U.S. Army, doesn't let her current job in government contracting get in the way of mothering cats and kittens. "When I have brand new kittens at home, I am able to go in to work a little late and leave a little early," she said.

Horton takes particular pride in Luna, the three-legged cat who first arrived at her home as a foster. Adopted by Horton in January 2015, Luna's traumas are completely behind her now. "She's wonderful and beautiful and happy," Horton said. ❤️



Horton brings one of her fosters to the AWLA for a check-up.



Luna, Horton's foster turned family member

Animal Services Tip #19

Lions and Tigers and Bears, Oh My!

Did you know a wide variety of wildlife can be found in Alexandria, including foxes, opossums, bats, turtles, snakes, hawks, deer, raccoons and even coyotes! Learn more about your native wild neighbors at AlexandriaAnimals.org/Wildlife.



In a Canine Costume Contest Everyone's a Winner

Whether you cast your Fan Favorite vote for Mama, Papa and Baby Bear or the pup with the most Nationals team spirit, every dog came out on top at the AWLA's 2019 Howl-O-Ween costume event and calendar launch! Located in a new waterfront venue, cow-costumed corgis and avocado-toast bulldogs were a common sight amid Old Town Alexandria's day of trick-or-treating. Our panel of judges from Frolick Dogs and Whole Dogz had a ruff time picking the top of the pack,

but the winners were Jim with Sally the Cowgirl for the Most Creative Costume, Space Kelly with Bodhi the Astronaut for the Best Human/Canine Combo Costume, Rachel with Leo the Bathtime Doggy as the Best Homemade Costume and Fan Favorite Misty with Gracie as "Baby (+) Shark"! Thank you to Riverside Taco Company for hosting our contest and to everyone who joined us in support of Alexandria's Animals! ❤️



You still have time to pick up your 2020 AWLA photo calendar, now \$10 or 3 for \$20. Just stop by the AWLA and tell them that you want to buy the cutest calendar in town!

Happy Tails

Roxie

Six-year-old treeing walker hound Roxie was never known for being shy. The exact opposite, she would happily insert herself into any situation, especially where snacks were involved. So when she came to the AWLA from the Pittsylvania Pet Center in southern Virginia, she quickly made friends with every person and pup she met. Roxie traveled to Alexandria as part of the Humane Society of the United States' first transfer through their Shelter Ally Project, an initiative created to help animals from areas with lower adoption rates find homes in places like Alexandria where there are more families looking for pets than animals that are available just from our jurisdiction. Having been overlooked repeatedly by adopters in Chatham, coming to Alexandria was the boost Roxie needed to finally find a family to call her own. After a few short months with us at the shelter, Roxie headed home with her new best friend, Shane Kuziel.

Roxie's charisma and knack for making friends didn't end when she left the AWLA. In fact, Roxie is just more of her lovable self every day, according to Kuziel. She still makes friends everywhere she goes and is known around her neighborhood and favorite dog park for her big smile and play style of a pup half her age! ❤️



Roxie on the trail for her new best friend



Roxie and Kuziel heading home

Tribute Donations

Thank you to everyone who donated in memory or honor of a loved one between January 1 and December 31, 2019. Donations of \$250 or more are recognized below.

In Memory of

Kristina Anstrom by S. Decker Anstrom
Rocco Apsehoff by Melanie Rowland
Luna Becker by Peter Ramsberger
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Bobbie Bosworth by Sam & Rosemarie Garrett
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2019 Vola Lawson Animal Advocates

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\$10,000+ financial/in-kind donations or 1,000 volunteer hours: Kirk Fedder, Rosemary Harris, Robert & Maureen Rehg and Ann Reid and the Estate of Reid & Molly Adler, along with










Thank you for supporting Alexandria's Animals!

VOLA LAWSON ANIMAL ADVOCATES

January 1 - December 31, 2019

The AWLA commends our Vola Lawson Animal Advocates (VoLAAs) for contributions made from January 1 through December 31, 2019. Thank you to the City of Alexandria, which allows us to continue to provide care, control and sheltering services to Alexandria's Animals.

VoLAAs are recognized individuals and businesses who give support at the highest levels. The program includes several levels of recognition for monetary donations and volunteer hours as well as in-kind donations made fiscally. **Animal Guardian** — \$25,000 or more financial or in-kind support or 5,000 volunteer hours; **Animal Champion** — \$10,000 or more financial or in-kind support or 1,000 volunteer hours; **Animal Friend** — \$5,000 or more financial or in-kind support or 500 volunteer hours; **Animal Companion** — \$2,500 or more financial or in-kind support or 250 volunteer hours; and **Animal Advocate** — \$1,000 or more in financial support or 100 volunteer hours.

For more information about becoming one of Alexandria's Animal Advocates, contact development@alexandrianimals.org.

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