A publication of the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria animal welfare gue of Alexandria

Taking a Holistic Approach to Understanding Shelter Dogs

A black and white Great Dane named Top raced around the large yard at the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria (AWLA), nipping at the heels of a brindle Shepherd/Lab mix called Marble, who was frolicking with a rowdy teenaged dog named Pumpkin. They splashed in the yard's plastic pool to the tune of barked greetings



from other dogs. It was their daily "playgroup."

But it was also a key moment for the AWLA staff: Observing these enrichment sessions can open a window to shelter dogs' personalities — and what they might be

seeking in a future home. It's just one way that the AWLA is now learning more about the dogs who come through their doors.

"Every dog who comes to us has had a major change in his life: an owner may have passed away, or his family may have moved or he may have been rescued from an abusive or neglectful home," said AWLA Executive Director Megan Webb. "We no longer perform temperament tests. Instead, we are now focused on helping each dog adjust to these stressful life changes and learning about the dog as we do."





cats with a cause

happy tails



hot weather

... and more!

a friend

The AWLA is taking an increasingly holistic approach to learning what makes a dog tick, gathering information in multiple ways: details about the dog's behavior from the animal's previous family, when available;



staff notes starting with the day the animal first arrived at the Vola Lawson Animal Shelter; the AWLA veterinarian's findings; and staff and volunteer observations during playgroups and daily interactions. Webb said that some of the previous methods of evaluating dogs, such as testing for aggression around food, have been found to be unreliable predictors of their behavior in a home; for example, some animals may have previously experienced severe food deprivation and can be ravenous.

A position statement recently issued by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals echoes the holistic approach to evaluating dog behavior. "A dog's personality is formed by a complex interplay between his genetic predispositions, his developmental circumstances and his life experiences," the statement says. "While behavior as a whole is a reflection of personality, a dog's behavior at any given time is heavily influenced by his emotional state, his stress level and the specific environment. Thus, any single source of information should be considered a piece of the puzzle."

Playgroups, which began at the AWLA about nine months ago, are not only enriching for the dogs but also provide information for the staff and even occasionally bring to light medical problems not obvious during physical exams. A limp that might appear when a dog romps in the yard is reported to the veterinarian, and that detail becomes part of a larger portrait of the individual animal. Playgroups also can be a great experience for a dog coping with life changes. "With dogs who have recently lost their owners and are a bit shut down, being around other dogs can really bring them out of their shell," Webb said.

The AWLA is also working with local dog trainers and behavior experts to expand its expertise and obtain feedback. Certified canine behavior consultant and trainer Beth Mullen, owner of Dog Latin Dog Training, is one of the many experts who have been contacted to evaluate and work with such dogs.

SUMMER 2018



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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 Megan Webb

As the Executive Director of the AWLA, every quarter I've been sharing my thoughts and experiences. The success of the organization is based on the hard work of many people. It is important that you hear from some of them. This issue I would like to introduce you to Stella Hanly, COO who plays a vital role at the AWLA.



Desilva Studios, LLC

Ten years ago, I was working as a software developer in a sterile, corporate office environment. I could never have imagined the meaning my work would have now, or that I would be doing it sitting next to a dog who needed me so much. I write this while Skywalker, my current office foster, snoozes at my feet. He is a senior, three-legged Cocker Spaniel who we quickly realized had an unusual problem. He is a very friendly, happy dog, but as soon as anyone tried to touch him, he would scream. I needed to really get a deeper understanding of Skywalker so I decided to make him my next office foster.

At the AWLA, offices are transformational for dogs or cats who need extra attention while they recover from a medical issue or behavioral challenge. For example, a cat who shows aggression in a cage will often calm down and show her friendly side in an office setting. The new human office mate often bonds deeply and quickly with the animal, in some ways taking on the role of the primary caregiver. The animal gets the chance to interact with staff and volunteers, joining us for meetings, serving as a conversation topic and enriching the office setting while getting the chance to come out of his (or her) shell and as he prepares to meet his future family.

One of these "office fosters" was Stevie. When I saw this scared senior in his kennel the day he was transferred to the AWLA, I knew he wasn't going to thrive there. He was barely responsive, and I could tell he was also experiencing vision and hearing loss. He looked utterly shut down, so I scooped him up and moved him into my office. The change was almost instantaneous. Suddenly Stevie was alert, seeking attention, responding to the people around him, and he started eating like a champ! Since I spent so much time with Stevie, I was able to notice that he could hear better

than we had originally thought, though unfortunately, his eyes were so badly damaged from years of infections and could not be saved. After recovering from this surgery in a foster home, Stevie came right back to my office. Every morning when he heard my voice, he'd greet me with a little dance, and every evening it became harder to say good-bye to him. The day he met his future family was bittersweet; I was so happy he was going to get the home experience he deserved, but knew I would miss my sweet office mate. Still, every time his adopters share an update on his progress (which can't happen often enough!), I realize it may not have happened if I hadn't made the decision to take this terrified dog into my office.

As I finish this letter I give Skywalker a little pet — he lets me do that now without his previous yelp — and I ponder how much he has changed since he has been in my office. Each of the animals who stays in my office changes me. Stevie taught me what difference a day can make. Skywalker teaches me that best friends are worth waiting for and tiny triumphs can make a whole day! Stevie and Skywalker, Bean and Chico, Tofu, Tempeh, Sophie and Lexi, and all the animals who passed through my office doors make me better at my job. I'm so honored to be able to take what they've taught me and "pay it forward" to the next animal in need (and it doesn't hurt to have a little friend beside me to brighten the occasional tough day). I feel lucky to share my work day (and often my lunch) with my office fosters, and I hope I brighten their day — and their lives — a little bit, too.



Two Shelter Cats Share Cuddles and a Common Condition

Sweetie is a two-year-old, long-haired brown tabby cat with extrasoft fur who found his way to the AWLA shelter in March as a stray. Friendly is a three-year old black cat who was surrendered to the shelter last November because his owner's other pets did not appreciate him. Sweetie and Friendly have something significant in common: They both are FIV positive.

FIV is an immune deficiency condition that is contagious to other cats, but not other animals or humans. Most common among cats who have lived outdoors, the infection is detected in about 20 cats taken in by the AWLA each year. Every cat who comes to the shelter is tested for the disease. While FIV can affect the health of some cats after the initial infection, many go on to lead long lives, only periodically experiencing illnesses such as respiratory infections and dental disease because of their immune-suppressed state.

"FIV is not as frightening as it sounds," said Jessica Almond, the AWLA's Director of Operations. "FIV cats can live healthy and happy lives and can safely live in homes with FIV negative cats.

FIV can only

be transmitted to another cat through a deep bite or from an FIV positive mother to her kittens. We house FIV positive cats separately at the shelter only because we don't have the capacity to slowly introduce cats to each other to see if they can live together without fighting." As with all new additions to a household, the AWLA recommends that FIV cats be slowly introduced to any existing pets to set everyone up for success as happy companions.

Almond says that all cats with FIV available for adoption at the shelter are designated as such, and adopters are provided with detailed information about taking care of a cat with FIV. The AWLA recommends that these cats remain indoor-only pets, which is their recommendation for all pets for health and safety reasons. It is advised that FIV positive cats be examined by a veterinarian twice a year. Otherwise, cats with FIV require the same care as other feline companions.

Sweetie and Friendly are the perfect example of how FIV cats can make wonderful playmates. When Friendly first arrived he was anything but; the name chosen for him was more a wish than an

> accurate description of his personality. "But a lot of time with AWLA staff and volunteers, plus Sweetie's positive influence, have transformed Friendly into the truly amiable cat that he is now," said Laurette Crum, who has devoted several volunteer shifts to petting and playing with the two. "Friendly grooms Sweetie, and Sweetie cuddles Friendly. They have grown a lot together, and we can't wait to hear their stories once they find their new homes, whether individually or together." 🥾

(cont. from page 1) This spring Mullen used her slow, steady approach with Top, the frightened adolescent Great Dane, and helped him work his way to the playgroups he so enjoyed.

"I was able to get him out of his kennel and then just did nothing for a while — just let him sniff around the yard," Mullen recalled. "After about 30 minutes, I gave him a little play bow, and he started zooming around." The socialization process continued at Top's gradual pace, reinforced by some deli roast beef and rotisserie chicken. "A week later," she said, "we were able to put a harness on him. He's a 'love' with other dogs now and has come a long way with people."

Kevin Gilliam, co-owner of Alexandria based Frolick Dogs, is another behavior expert who worked with Top. Staff had noticed Top's discomfort with men, so Kevin helped staff to evaluate the severity of the discomfort, and with that information, to begin to overcome his fear. After three or four sessions, Top

and Kevin became fast friends, demonstrating that with continued patience and training, Top's fear could could be overcome. The AWLA is careful to point out to potential adopters that behaviors seen in at the shelter may differ from an animal's behavior in the home. No matter how much attention an animal is given, the shelter environment can be stressful, and behaviors they exhibit when worried might differ from those displayed when they are comfortable. However, the multiple touchpoints now included in the AWLA evaluation process are allowing the staff to get a more complete picture of an animal's personality.

The expanded evaluation process has paid off for Marble and Top. Marble, the Shepherd/Lab mix, had arrived at the shelter terrified but bursting with energy. He gained new confidence during playgroups and has since been adopted to a home with another dog and is thriving. And handsome Great Dane Top has found a new home — and has a canine roommate who loves to play just as much as he does. 🌜







As summer temperatures rise, our animal friends need help to stay healthy and safe.

Hot Weather

ips for Your Pets

Here are a few things you can do to ensure the safety of your pets.

Beware Hot Cars

NEVER leave pets *OR* family in a parked car without air conditioning.

- When it's 72° outside, it can be 116° inside the car.
- At 85°, your car can reach 120°.
- Living beings left in hot cars can suffer illness, organ damage, brain damage or even death.

* Not only is it dangerous and deadly, in Alexandria it's illegal to leave your pet in a car if the outside temperature is more than 70° or the ambient temperature inside the car exceeds 80°.

Cooling Down

On a dog-day afternoon, provide plenty of shade and water.



- On a hot day, remember that your pet may not want to be outside.
- Make sure cool, fresh water and a shaded area are accessible whenever pets are outside.

Danger Signs

Know the signs of overheating:

- Excessive panting or difficulty breathing
- Increased heart and respiratory rates
- Drooling
- Weakness or collapse



If your pet is overheating or shows signs of heat stroke, contact your veterinarian immediately.

Change Your Hours

Adapt your exercise schedule.

- Exercise your pet in the early morning or late evening, and adjust the intensity and duration of all exercise.
- When outside, avoid hot asphalt, which can burn paws.
- Dogs with short snouts and/or thick coats are more sensitive to the effects of heat and can overheat at milder temperatures.
- Don't forget that pets can get sunburned, and pet sunblock is recommended for pets with white fur, pink noses or exposed skin.

Monitor the Moisture

It's the heat AND the humidity!

For an animal with a built-in fur coat, humidity can be just as harmful as the heat, causing body temperatures to skyrocket.



Beat the Heat

OTHER COOLING TIPS

- Fans are less effective on animals than humans.
- Help your pet cool off from the inside with an icy treat.
- Don't forget to stay well-hydrated!

Animal Welfare League of Alexandria

4101 Eisenhower Avenue Alexandria, Virginia 22304 703-746-4774 AlexandriaAnimals.org

Remembering Shannon

It is with great sadness that we share that Shannon Swanson, AWLA's former Director of Communications, passed away earlier this summer, surrounded by her family and loved ones. Her influence can be seen throughout the organization: She designed our new logo to reflect the modern, fun and expansive organization we had become. She created our new website, modernized this newsletter and created signage, handouts and so much more to tell the story of the AWLA and the animals we help. Shannon even created the shelter's new mascot, Alex Meow. Everyone who knew Shannon considered themselves lucky to be touched by her creativity, compassion and vibrant personality.

Shannon was loving, funny, compassionate and outgoing, and she brought joy and happiness to the shelter. She had the ability to read people, knowing when they needed some words of encouragement or a special note left on their desk. Her empathy and emotional

intelligence could not only be seen with people but also animals; she had a great understanding of their needs and worked with multiple dogs with behavioral issues to help them to find their future homes.

Shannon touched so many lives, from the people she worked with to the animals at the shelter and the adopters she helped connect with their future pets. While we mourn her loss, we are all grateful for the time we had with her. In typical fashion, she left us with so many ideas on how to continue to implement her vision for the AWLA, and we know her impact will continue long into the future.

Alexandria's Animals Services Names New Chief

Congratulations to Officer Tammy Doran, who was named Chief of AWLA's Animal Services by unanimous City Council consent earlier this year. Officer Doran had held the post of Animal Services Sergeant at the AWLA for several years, and before that she worked for Animal Control in Richmond, Va. She has extensive experience with animal services work and has coordinated closely with the City of Alexandria's Commonwealth Attorney's Office to charge and prosecute cases of animal abuse and neglect. Chief Doran is proud to lead a department that she says "is making great strides to support our community and help educate Alexandrians about the welfare of animals," though she reminds everyone that she is part of a larger team that supports animals and their owners across the city.

Every month, AWLA's Animal Services responds to more than 200 calls for support, ranging from barking dogs to wildlife trapped inside residents' homes to cruelty investigations and animal seizures. Chief Doran describes her job as "speaking for those who do not have voices of their own," and we are so excited to hear more of her voice in this new role.



2019 Animal of the Year **Crandon**

Congratulations to **CRANDON**, Alexandria's 2019 Animal of the Year and winner of the AWLA's "Pets in the City" photo calendar contest, which raised \$92,600 this past June! Thank you to all the generous contributors who donated to aid Alexandria's Animals! You can see Crandon on the cover of our 2019 calendar, which is available for pre-order now at AlexandriaAnimals.org/calendar.





Shannon holding one of her own designs

Recognizing Our Supporters

WOOFS! Gives Shelter Dogs a Place to Learn and Grow

Asiago, Cheddar, Feta, Gorgonzola, Gouda, Havarti, Mascarpone, Mozzarella, Muenster, Provolone and Ricotta might sound like a stroll down a grocery aisle, but it was actually a panoply of puppies competing in the "Great Puppy Games" earlier this summer at WOOFS! Dog Training Center.

The puppies are the 11 offspring of a hound mix named Brie, sent by the AWLA to WOOFS! for some special care in her last weeks of pregnancy. The birth of not one, not two but 11 puppies provided an opportunity for WOOFS! to hone its training skills for young dogs, a special emphasis of the center. "One of my personal interests is getting puppies started off on the right foot," said Dr. Laura Sharkey, founder of WOOFS! "We focus on socializing them in the 6- to 10-week-old period, meeting other dogs and people." Along with the usual work of training and boarding dogs for paying clients, WOOFS!





is an Animal Guardian of the AWLA, donating thousands of hours each year to foster dogs who need special attention and care. "We might not have been able to take in Brie if WOOFS! hadn't agreed to foster her," said Echo Keif, AWLA Community Outreach and Adoptions Coordinator. But after their birth at WOOFS! — and the special training for the Puppy Games — the 11 dogs journeyed to the shelter for adoption. All have now gone to new homes. Some dog owners don't realize that training can begin for puppies as young as three

weeks, Sharkey said. WOOFS! starts its nursery school with basics like paper training, coming when called and paying attention to what humans are saying to them. Training sessions for puppies are brief, she said, because of their short attention spans. Besides, she pointed out, their tiny bellies can only hold so many treats.

Training should be fun for both puppies and adult dogs, Sharkey said. "If any angst or frustration appears, something is wrong with the training and it needs to be evaluated. The dogs should think it's all a game."

It certainly was fun and games for Cheeses Eleven. Showing off such skills as following their trainer, coping with distracting objects and agility, Asiago emerged as the Big Cheese with assistance from trainer Jane Saunders; siblings Mozzarella and Gorgonzola also led the pack. Sharkey ushered puppy Mascarpone through the course and senior trainer Erica Pytlovany presided over the trainers and their canine companions in front of an audience of friends, family and AWLA followers.

Laura Sharkey will speak about raising dogs — and puppies — at a special AWLA Speaker Series event Thursday, Sept. 27, at 7 p.m. at the AWLA. More information can be found at <u>AlexandriaAnimals.org/events</u>.

Giving Animals the Gift of Time

Deborah Dobek is one of many AWLA foster caregivers who offer so much of their time to shelter animals, while rarely stepping foot inside our doors. Over the last two years, Dobek has taken several dogs into her home, often small and in need of intensive medical or behavioral support, a level of constant, individualized attention that can be difficult to provide in the shelter environment. For example, in summer 2017, several Maltese and Yorkshire terriers came to the AWLA after being rescued from a defunct puppy-raising facility. They were all undersocialized and would need oneon-one care to teach them how to trust, how to live in a home and ultimately, how to become a pet. Deb fostered two of the dogs, Morticia and Blueberry.

"I remember the first day that I brought Morticia and Blueberry home with me from the shelter. They were these two tiny pups, terrified of everything. My heart broke every time I looked at them at the thought of what they had been through in their young lives," recalls Dobek. "Normal for them was not receiving love and attention, and they hid in the corner of the living room for weeks." Dobek's hard work and extra time clearly paid off, because these pups who once would not allow themselves to be touched were soon ready to find families of their own.



Dobek is currently caring for Benji, a one-year-old Yorkshire terrier who has undergone the

second of two major surgeries to correct a severe case of *medially luxating patellas*, or shifting kneecaps. "Benji has had a smooth recovery and despite a long period of crate rest, he has kept up a great spirit...and those cute puppy antics." Thanks to Dobek's diligence and support, Benji is recovering comfortably, undergoing physical therapy on his path to eventual adoption.. Dobek remembers each of the pups she fostered with fondness. "Each of the dogs that have stayed with me has left a special mark on my heart. With a little love and nurturing, it is amazing to watch them begin to thrive as happy, healthy pets that go on to bring joy to the homes of their new families."

To learn more about our foster program, visit <u>AlexandriaAnimals.org/fostering</u>.

Happy Tails Every year, thousands of animals come to the AWLA, and they all have a different story to tell. Here are just a few of the adoptables who have shared our shelter and our hearts.

Growing through Leaps and Bounds



Marble relaxing in his new home

Every animal who comes to the AWLA reacts differently to the shelter environment, and for Marble, that reaction was to hide under his bed, which for a dog his size was no easy feat. At 9 months old, this handsome brindle Shepherd mix was almost fully grown, but when shelter staff offered hot dogs and other treats to coax Marble out of his cramped quarters, they had little success. He did not know how to be around people.

Staff though Marble might benefit from more interaction with other dogs, but his first playgroup sessions began with staff members carrying Marble to the yard because he would go limp when he felt stress. However, once he saw his dog friends, his worries melted away; he just wanted to run



and play. Soon he began to associate seeing people with the positive reward of playtime. For Marble, the company of dogs was exactly what was needed for him to realize that hanging out with people wasn't just okay; it could be fun! Marble was on the road to adoption.

His new family is happy to report that Marble — now known as Shiloh — has become quite comfortable in his new home, enjoying his time not only with their dog but with the human members of his new pack as well. We're happy to see that this goofy boy is now using the bed as it was intended: for a well-deserved nap!

Gobo Is One Good Boy!



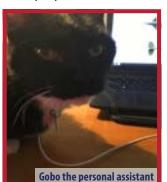
Gobo came to the AWLA in the winter of 2017; he had been ill and his owners could no longer maintain his care. We could tell that this senior kitty was not feeling his finest; he was thin and his black-and-white coat was dull and flecked with dry skin. He was visibly dehydrated and his breath was wheezy, but when our veterinary staff examined him, he focused his energy on nuzzling their hands.

Previous veterinary examinations

had intimated cancer, since he would eat and eat and not put on any weight, but an ultrasound showed nothing specific. We thought that his tummy troubles might be of a different nature, and once we switched to a specialized diet that helped his body process proteins better, we saw him gain weight, become more active and add a sheen to his gorgeous fur. Gobo moved to one of our staff offices and showed off his new demeanor to all of the staff members and volunteers who crossed his path.

Gobo took a little time to find his family, but it was worth the wait. His adopters share that as soon as he joined them, it was like he had been there for years. They say he is VERY vocal

about breakfast, lunch, dinner, afternoon tea and any other meal he can get his paws on. He has also embarked on a second career as a personal assistant, supervising his people from his perch on the desk to make sure that belly rubs make it into the daily schedule. Our good boy may have had a long journey, but it's clear to see that the destination made it all worth it!



Double the Chinchillas, Double the Fun

Luna and Sol, Florence and Rue came to us as bonded pairs. Chinchillas are social animals, and we knew it was important to keep these couples cogether. Chinchillas are certainly adorable, but they need a particular

type of pet owner who is knowledgeable about their habits and needs, and we knew it would be difficult to find adopters for all four.

while chinchillas look like cuddly mini-teddy bears, they don't always appreciate being handled, which some owners find difficult. They

are also more active at night, which means that while most people are sleeping, chinchillas are at their most energetic. And finally, chinchillas can live anywhere from 10 to 20 years, so an owner needs to be prepared for their chinchillas to keep them company for a long time.

Luckily, both chinchilla pairs found their families in early 2018. Luna and Sol even entered our 2019 "Pets in the City" photo contest and showed off some of their indoor acrobatics and home-decorating skills as part of their entries. If you're ever wondering what kind of interesting and exotic animals have most recently joined us at the AWLA, check our our website at

AlexandriaAnimals.org/Adopt.



DeSilva Studios, LL



Luna exploring his new surroundings

7

VOLA LAWSON ANIMAL ADVOCATES January 1, 2018 - June 30, 2018

The AWLA commends our Vola Lawson Animal Advocates (VoLAAs) for contributions made from January 1, 2018 - June 30, 2018. Thank you to the City of Alexandria, which allows us to continue to provide care, control and sheltering services to Alexandria's Animals.

Vola Lawson Animal Advocates (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 Advocates**—\$1,000 or more or 100 volunteer hours.

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

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Thank you to everyone who donated in memory or honor April 1, 2018 -June 30, 2018. AWLA mails a card to the recipient; donations of \$250+ are recognized here.

In Memory Of

Johanna Boegli by Marrianne Boegli Paul Durn by Kirk Fedder Nancy Ford-Johne by Kirk Fedder Blue and Timmy by Theresa & Randall Walker

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