



Robin, Adopted July 2020

TAILS

from the **AWLA**

Fall 2020

How Does a Shelter Make It Through a Pandemic?

CARING FOR ANIMALS MORE CRITICAL THAN EVER

Adopting animals by appointment only. Volunteers sewing masks and kennel curtains at home. Urgent requests for pet food and supplies. Quarantined schoolchildren gathering around their home computers to make crafts with AWLA staff. Virtual “yappy hours.” A few short months ago, most of these activities would have seemed foreign to the staff at the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria (AWLA), but almost overnight they became integral parts of the routine.

As the global pandemic reached the Northern Virginia area, the AWLA’s top priority was making sure the shelter was safe for the community, staff and the animals.

On the advice of national veterinary and shelter associations, we made space to take in animals of community members stricken by COVID-19. As the spring progressed and the virus began to spread throughout

the community, AWLA Executive Director Stella Hanly continued to follow the lead of the City of Alexandria, and in mid-March, with the goal of helping staff maintain safe physical distance, reduced onsite staffing to a skeleton crew who maintained animal care, with the remaining workers carrying out their regular duties from home. To help manage shelter



An AWLA staff member brings Sadie Kay to meet her new family.

Focusing on Fear Free

PAGE 5

“The AWLA has always adhered to best practices to keep our animals safe and comfortable,” said Executive Director Stella Hanly, “but as new methods are developed, we want to continue to expand our efforts to provide the best care that we can.”

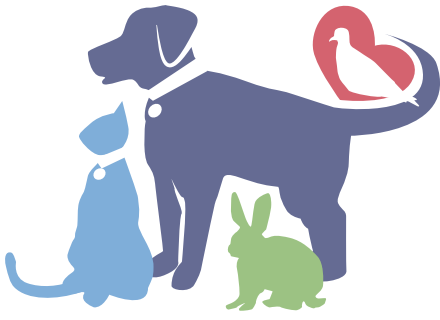
Small Creatures Find Great Comfort

PAGE 6

For Jennifer O’Boyle, serving as a volunteer foster “parent” for the AWLA can mean sitting in her Alexandria apartment’s second bathroom surrounded by 11 rabbits.

population, transfers of animals from other areas for adoption were temporarily halted. Adoptions were suspended, and the majority of the AWLA’s adoptable animals were moved to foster homes.

But the AWLA knew that animals needed assistance beyond the shelter walls. Our Pet Pantry, which had already been serving the needs of the community for years, proved to be more important than ever. (Continued on Page 3)



Animal Welfare League of Alexandria

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AlexandriaAnimals.org

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Hours of Operation

To limit the spread of COVID-19 in our community, the AWLA is open **by appointment only** for community assistance and adoptions.

View our current operating status, available services and adoptable animals at AlexandriaAnimals.org.



Dusty, Adopted March 2020

Dirty Paw Photography

From the Desk of Stella Hanly

More than two-thirds of the way through this most unusual of years, I am taking time to reflect on all the good things the AWLA has accomplished in the six months since our day-to-day operations as we knew them came to a halt. While we, like everyone else, have had days of struggle and uncertainty, thanks to our community and our own wonderful staff and volunteers, the AWLA has managed to pivot, providing not only the same but a greater level of service to our community. Since April 1, 2020,

- We were the first organization in NOVA to offer 100% virtual adoptions!
- More than 450 animals have been adopted
- Our Animal Services Officers have responded to over 1,250 calls
- More than 7,000 pounds of pet food and supplies have been distributed to community members
- Over 300 animals from unresourced localities have been transferred into our facility
- More than 7,000 hours were volunteered from home
- Nearly 200 students participated in Humane Education programs, both virtually and in-person from a safe physical distance
- More than 300 animals spent time in foster homes
- We hosted our first-ever drive-up, low-cost vaccine clinic and
- Over 100 spay/neuter vouchers were made available to low-income households.

So while things may look and feel a little different at the AWLA, I am proud to report that they definitely haven't slowed down!

The events of 2020 have shown that our investment in our Community Programs department, which offers support to owned animals in the community, was not only a wise decision but one that hopefully models the future of animal sheltering. As people in our community have experienced economic hardship, they are turning to us for assistance, and we are glad we can help them keep and support their beloved pets. As other jurisdictions have become overwhelmed with an influx of animals, we are prepared to respond to their requests for help. And as Alexandrians — and people across the region — are seeking the love and companionship of animals to help them through periods of isolation, we are happy to be able to help them connect with their new best friends.

We have been able to continue to change, evolve and grow during this time thanks to the dedication of our incredible staff who have worked tirelessly in and out of the shelter, and thanks to YOU, our incredible community, who has answered all of our calls for help, from Pet Pantry food, to kitten formula to the funds to help a puppy receive much-needed surgery. With such an amazing community in our corner, we can't wait to see what else we can achieve — together!



Stella Hanly with Bart the kitten, adopted in August 2020

TAILS FROM THE AWLA

(Continued from Page 1) When budgets are tight due to lost jobs or medical bills, pet owners may be faced with the tough decision to buy food for themselves or feed their pet. The Community Pet Pantry, which is primarily stocked by donations from our community, has provided more than 7,000 pounds of food and supplies via request to Northern Virginia residents since mid-March, and the requests continue to grow each month. The shelter also continues to provide pet food to seniors and housebound community members through the AniMeals program.

It was clear that Alexandria's Animals needed the AWLA more than ever — and the quarantined community needed their animals. The AWLA responded with an innovative idea: Virtual Adoptions. Starting on April 2, adopters could view the

For more information about the program, including donating food or supplies, visit AlexandriaAnimals.org/CommunityPetPantry.

available pets on the AWLA website and then meet their favorites through Zoom sessions led by staff members. After conferring with staff by phone, the adopters physically distanced in the AWLA parking lot to wait for their new family member, brought directly to their car on a leash or in a carrier. Staff also continued to follow up with adopters after they brought their new family members home, and to maintain the Behavior Hotline, responding to questions or concerns about pets in the community, even those not adopted at the AWLA.

On July 5, as Northern Virginia entered Phase 3 of reopening, the AWLA resumed in-shelter visits for adopters, opening more appointment slots and extending shelter hours. Demand surged: In July, the new measures saw 136 adoptions, a 26% increase over July 2019. In preparation for the return of shelter visitors, we worked with the Alexandria Health Department to earn the ALX Promise certification, demonstrating that we are practicing the best standards for health and safety for our visitors and our team.

Staff were not the only team members whose work was affected by COVID-19. As the AWLA restricted shelter entry to promote physical distancing, volunteers found new ways to lend their support...from home. They sprung into action, writing bios for adoptable animals, sewing curtains for kennels and face masks for employees, whipping up enrichment items for shelter animals and helping the shelter with administrative tasks. In June, volunteers began returning to the shelter in a limited capacity after undergoing special training and observing expanded safety protocols, providing support to staff in caring for the growing number of animals.

And while we haven't been able to connect with our community in person, we still found ways to meet with animal lovers young and old, offering them opportunities to "visit" the shelter without having to step through its doors. As school suspended in-person teaching in the spring, the AWLA launched a virtual humane education program for kids of all ages called Junior PAWS, which offered weekly lessons on topics ranging from animal-themed crafts to animal careers. Weekly live Facebook and Instagram events showed off adoptable animals and tips and tricks for pet owners, and virtual events for all ages, like the Great Kitten Games, Barks & Bingo and trainings for pet owners, provided education and entertainment from the comfort of attendees' homes. And after surveying parents, we once again held our annual summer camp, offering half-day sessions and practicing physical distancing, mask wearing and lots of sanitizing; campers got to interact with shelter animals and learn from outside experts.

"I have been overwhelmed by the heroic and innovative efforts of the AWLA staff and volunteers to keep the community's treasured animals safe," Hanly said. "The practices we've pioneered over the last few months will guide our way as we move forward. This is certainly a mighty virus, but our need for the love and companionship of animals is even stronger."



The AWLA continues to offer virtual and in-person adoptions, with more information and scheduling available at AlexandriaAnimals.org/Adopt-By-Appointment.



Ariel, Adopted March 2020
Alison Lane Photography

It's Raining Cats!

KITTEN SEASON IS HERE

Sylvia Gethicker and her daughter, Sylvia Landis, thought they were all prepared for the skinny gray tabby cat they were fostering at their Alexandria home to deliver her litter of kittens in May. They had put together the “Cadillac” of beds for her, a comfy canvas castle tucked away in a small bedroom. The birth was expected in one or two weeks.

But Sylvia G. was walking around the block at lunchtime not long after the cat's arrival when her daughter came running toward her, hands in the air. “Mom,” she said, “Gracie's having her kittens on the couch!”

At the same time, in other foster homes around the area, kittens were spending their days jumping in boxes, climbing on curtains, napping, grooming and chasing balls and tails, all part of their journey toward adoption.

Welcome to kitten season.

Kitten season is the time of year — beginning in spring and tapering off in late fall — when the majority of kittens are born, says Elena Carver, Animal Welfare League of Alexandria (AWLA) Foster Care Coordinator. The majority of kittens come from stray cats who birth their litters outside, often in backyards, crawl spaces and sheds. “If the mother cat is nearby, we advise people to leave them alone, as she generally provides the best care for really young kittens, but if they look unhealthy or cold, we need to intervene,” Elena said.

Kittens must be spayed or neutered before adoption, and they must reach a weight of 2.5 pounds before having that surgery, said Elena. So it's up to her and Foster Care Coordinator Kimberly Weilmann to quickly match them up with foster caregivers who can see them through their early days. About 180 individuals and families now serve as fosters for many types of animals for the AWLA, some specializing in caring for homeless kittens. “It's extremely rewarding work,” Elena said. “You can take a tiny baby and raise it into an independent creature that can become someone's cherished pet.”

And the AWLA has once again seen a cascade of kittens this season. Some kittens come in as newborns with their mothers, others all alone. Taco and Tuesday were about 10 days old when a resident transported them from a backyard where no mother

was in sight. The brown, striped kittens seemed healthy except that an examination showed their fur contained a type of lice specific to cats. Elena put out a call for a foster willing to take the kittens on and treat them for the parasites, and Martina Cotton of Lorton stepped up.

Tiny Taco and Tuesday needed plenty of attention from Martina, an immigration lawyer who has been working from home. Less than two weeks old, the kittens required bottle feeding every three hours, round the clock. And every other day Martina had to give the kittens a special bath to combat the lice. As they grew, Taco and Tuesday were all kitten, playing hard for five or 10 minutes at a time, sleeping for an hour, and then repeating, Martina said.

Cotton housed the kittens in a spare bedroom to separate them from her two pet cats, but her German shepherd/boxer mix Ginger just couldn't stay away.



Taco and Tuesday, found abandoned in a backyard, get some TLC at the AWLA shelter during kitten season.

Elena Carver



Foster Care Coordinator Elena Carver provides a first round of preventive medicine to a kitten during a routine checkup at the shelter.

Ginger has been a doting mother to the dozens of foster cats and kittens who have shared her home, grooming them and cuddling with them. “After bottle feedings, Ginger would clean the milk off Taco and Tuesday’s faces,” Martina said.

Some foster kittens need some creative intervention from the AWLA. A brown-and-black tabby kitten named Bluejay was craving feline companionship at her foster home after her mother weaned her. At the same time, Goodall, the tiniest member of a litter of six kittens named for conservationists, was underweight and not quite ready to move on for adoption with her litter mates. Elena Carver decided Bluejay and Goodall should meet. Foster caregiver Jo Kang picked Goodall up at the shelter and brought her home to meet Bluejay.

“Goodall was a little bigger than Bluejay but also very friendly,” said Jo, of Alexandria. “Bluejay whined a little at first looking for her mom, but Goodall tolerated it well.” It wasn’t long before the kittens were sleeping together at night with Kang’s resident cats. And one of their favorite pastimes became swatting at the tail of Kang’s German shepherd. The dog was apparently cowed by the kittens.

For Sylvia Gethicker and Sylvia Landis, the fosters to new mother Gracie, the home birth turned them into midwives on the spot. Three gray kittens, two boys and a girl, were born on their blanket-covered couch as the fosters wiped the kittens’ faces to stimulate breathing when needed. Mother Gracie began nursing them right away, Sylvia G. said, and later the four became content to stay in the “castle” in the bedroom.

Sylvia G. took the kittens to the shelter every two weeks for wellness checks and the necessary shots. Finally, in July, she transported them back to the shelter to be made available for adoption. “It’s a lot of fun, very rewarding work,” said Sylvia, who has fostered dozens of kittens. “Gracie was a great mom — and at least she didn’t decide to have the kittens in the middle of the night.”



Gracie and her litter, safe and comfortable in the foster home of Sylvia Gethicker and Sylvia Landis
Sylvia Landis



AWLA veterinary staff help a cat feel comfortable during an exam.

Focusing on Fear-Free

Like so many organizations, the pandemic gave staff at the AWLA the time to stop and consider how we could best serve our constituents — and for our team, expanding our focus on the safety and comfort of animals entering the Vola Lawson Animal Shelter was a key priority. That’s why in April and May 2020, each staff member earned his or her Fear Free® Certification.

The Fear Free program was developed by Dr. Marty Becker and provides guidance on how to keep animals not only healthy in a shelter environment but also comfortable and unafraid. Online trainings in the program highlight ways to conduct medical exams, practice behavior modification and even bring animals into the shelter that help them feel most comfortable.

“The AWLA has always adhered to best practices to keep our animals safe and comfortable,” said Executive Director Stella Hanly, “but as new methods are developed, we want to continue to expand our efforts to provide the best care that we can.”

Fear Free certification will become part of the training for all new staff. Members of the AWLA team also undergo trainings in animal body language, behavior modification, exotic animals, wildlife response and more as part of their roles at the Vola Lawson Animal Shelter.

Animal Services Tip #113

The fall is mushroom season but not for pets. While only 1% of all mushroom varieties are toxic to pets, they can be hard to differentiate, so it’s better to keep your furry friend away from all mushroom-type fungi!



SUPPORTING ALEXANDRIA'S ANIMALS

Small Creatures Find Great Comfort with Jennifer O'Boyle

For **Jennifer O'Boyle**, serving as a volunteer foster “parent” for the AWLA can mean sitting in her Alexandria apartment’s second bathroom surrounded by 11 rabbits. That’s where she set up a three-month safe haven for a black-and-white mother rabbit and her brood of 10, who had arrived the day after they were born at the shelter. Smaller than the palm of her hand, furless and with tightly closed eyes, each baby was just a “little blob,” O’Boyle said. “I’d just sit with all of them in the bathroom and let them run around on me to give the mother a break.”

O’Boyle’s main job was to keep mother rabbit supplied with lots of hay to eat, a clean litter box and some socializing. “She was an awesome mama, so taking care of her was taking care of the babies,” O’Boyle recalled. As the bunnies grew, their distinct personalities emerged, some curious and others content to sit in the corner and watch the action. And as they became able to eat on their own, O’Boyle returned them, one by one, to the shelter for adoption.

O’Boyle, who works full time for a trade association, has been a volunteer with the AWLA since 2007, assisting with critical shelter functions such as transporting animals from low-resource areas to Alexandria for adoption, mentoring volunteers and training them to work with cats and small animals, including, during the pandemic, over Zoom. She’s a volunteer with a rare specialty, developed with guidance from the AWLA staff: handling and nurturing small animals, such as rabbits, guinea pigs and reptiles. Much of her volunteer time and energy has gone into fostering; she estimates she’s taken care of 50 animals at home so far, including some kittens.

When two tiny geckos arrived at her apartment suffering from calcium deficiency due to poor care in a previous household, O’Boyle had to act quickly. “When I first got them they were very pale and not moving much, but feeding them the right diet three times a day brought their color back and they got pretty feisty,” O’Boyle recalled. “I just parked their enclosure in the living room and kept an eye on them.” The geckos were soon given a clean bill of health and just as quickly adopted.

O’Boyle became an instant expert on baby mice when two mice she fostered quickly produced a litter of four, all of them bald and the size of O’Boyle’s fingernail.

O’Boyle has two cats of her own, Morrigan (a former foster cat) and AWLA shelter alum Borvo, both named for Celtic gods.

Morrigan has been especially fascinated by the parade of guests, including a red-eared slider turtle named Valley Boy, who O’Boyle fostered this spring. Morrigan became so excited at Valley Boy’s arrival that he jumped into the water-filled aquarium for a brief visit with the turtle, who was no worse for the wear after meeting his unexpected guest.

“Valley Boy’s a friendly dude, very chill,” O’Boyle said. He likes to spend his days sunning himself under the aquarium’s heat lamp and rearranging the enclosure’s furniture. “Apparently I don’t put the furniture back in the right places after I clean the aquarium,” she explained. Valley Boy showed off his unique personality during virtual meet-and-greets with potential adopters.

O’Boyle was excited for Valley Boy when he found his new home in July. “Being able to foster allows me to give the animals back and send them out into the world,” she said. “I like knowing they’re out there being happy.”



O'Boyle stops by the AWLA to spend time with some of her small animal friends.

Shelley Castle Photography



O'Boyle's recently adopted foster, Valley Boy, posing from his tank.

Jennifer O'Boyle

A Legacy of Caring for Animals in Need

Mary Jean Crowley was a lifelong lover of animals.

“She would call us because she wanted to talk to us about that passion,” recalls Development Coordinator Lia Machuca. “She loved to get on the phone and make a donation, then talk about her dog and how she was glad she could make a small difference for other animals like him.”

“Mrs. Crowley was one of the first people I remember speaking with when I started at the AWLA,” remembers Gina Hardter, Director of Marketing & Communications. “She wanted to make a donation to us, and she wanted to do it by entering her dog Tanner in our photo calendar contest. She sent the most handsome photo, and it was clear how much she loved him.”

Tanner was the most recent of many dogs who inspired Crowley’s passion for animal welfare. The boxer was her constant companion and was by her side in her final days.

Mary Jean Crowley passed away in June 2019, but not before making a final gift to improve the lives of animals: a bequest in her will to the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria.

“Mrs. Crowley always told us she wanted to make a small difference, but her generosity will impact the lives of thousands of animals,” said Executive Director Stella Hanly. “I wish we had the chance to show her how much this will mean for the AWLA and the animals who come through our doors.”

Mary Jean Crowley is survived by two sons, their wives, a granddaughter, several nieces and nephews and Tanner.

If you’d like to learn more about how your planned gift can save the lives of countless animals, please email us at legacy@alexandriaanimals.org.



MORE THAN JUST A PRETTY FACE

Congratulations to **Chewy**, who earned the most votes in the AWLA’s annual photo calendar contest in June and was named Alexandria’s Animal of 2021!

This year’s event focused on how pets were supporting their people in a work-from-home capacity, and creative entrants submitted photos of pets at computers, working with office supplies and even helping to dig a new flower bed. But Chef Chewy’s eye-catching entry showed the pup at the kitchen counter, clad in an apron and chef’s hat, perfecting his buttermilk biscuits. According to his entry, Chewy “enjoys eating more than cooking but he is still a real treat to have at home” this past spring.

The 2021 calendar cover was hard-fought between Chewy and feline entrant Asbury, with Chewy pulling ahead with only minutes left in the contest on June 30, but both were happy to go above and beyond to support the AWLA and the animals it helps.

The 2021 calendar will be available for sale, as well as for pick-up by those who pre-ordered, at the AWLA later this fall.



Chewy posing for his 2021 cover photo



Chewy’s winning photo in the AWLA’s 2021 Photo Calendar Contest

Eye See Life Photography

HAPPY TAILS

ADOPTION VIRTUAL BUT STILL WARM AND FUZZY

“**Tigger**, Tigger,” 13-year-old Allayna said over and over as a year-old pit bull terrier she had never met leaped in her lap and licked her face. “As soon as I saw her, I thought of Tigger from ‘Winnie-the-Pooh,’” Allayna recalled. “She was just so loving and protective.”

It seemed like the proverbial love at first sight for Allayna and her mother, Cassandra Eichner. But the encounter outside the AWLA shelter wasn’t technically their first sight of the dog. Eichner and her daughter had chosen Tigger, then known as Beanie, by viewing adoptable dogs on the AWLA’s website as part of a new virtual adoption process, brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Eichner and Allayna watched from home as Beanie played lovingly with the staffers. “I could almost feel her presence through the screen by seeing how joyful she was,” Cassandra Eichner recalled.

During subsequent phone consultations with the staff, Eichner and her daughter asked lots of questions, including about the dog’s medical history, and then, after a conversation between mother and daughter about the responsibility of owning a dog, they agreed that Beanie was the one. Eichner said she was nervous about that first meeting, but Beanie came right out to them on a leash, ready for a walk. “As soon as we finished the walk, she hopped right into the car,” Eichner said. “I can’t believe how trusting and loving she was.”

“Tigger” has turned out to be a very curious dog who wants to sniff and see everything. And there has been plenty to see and smell — she has hiked in the Smoky Mountains and romped on the beach in the Outer Banks, among other travels. Sleeping at night with Allayna might be her favorite activity. “She is the perfect dog for our family,” Eichner said.



Allayna Eichner and Tigger at play in North Carolina’s Outer Banks.

Cassandra Eichner

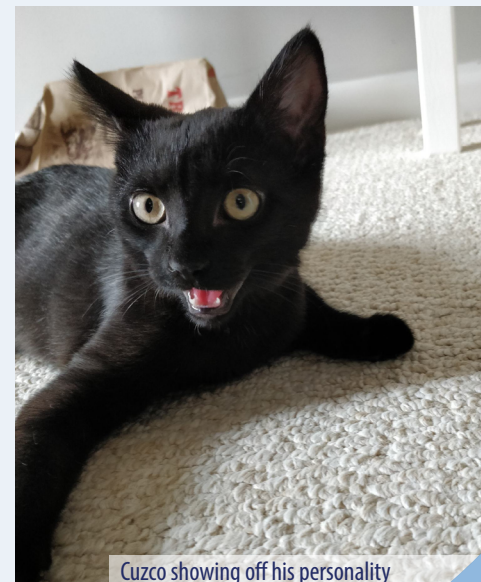
In May of 2019, “Happy Hour” might have meant a time to catch up with friends or meet with coworkers, but in May of 2020, a Kitten Happy Hour at the AWLA meant an opportunity for kittens and people to connect virtually during a time when in-person meetings weren’t feasible due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This Kitten Happy Hour featured five siblings, Corwin, Cousteau, Fossey, Irwin and Murie, and attendees tuning in from across the community, including Josephine Neulen and her boyfriend — Fossey’s soon-to-be family.

The event was for anyone who wanted to spend some time with kittens, whether they were planning to adopt or not, and helped support other animals in the care of the AWLA. While the five kittens played together for their new friends to watch over Zoom, AWLA staff introduced each and shared information that the kittens’ fosters had shared about them. Having spent a few weeks in their foster home, each kitten’s personality was described to the audience as they were introduced.

“Fossey was described as “willful” when we first met him during the Virtual Kitten Happy Hour,” recalls Neulen, “and we wholeheartedly agree. He definitely knows what he wants.”

“Turns out, my boyfriend clicked with Fossey almost immediately. He said he loved how silly he was with his siblings, jumping around and chasing toys. We picked Fossey up a week later!”

Fossey now goes by **Cuzco** and every day is still a new adventure for him and his family. His “willful” personality means his bold nature always shines through. Whether Cuzco is exploring a new shelf that he’s now big enough to jump to or loving his people, he does so with gusto.



Cuzco showing off his personality

Josephine Neulen

VOLA LAWSON ANIMAL ADVOCATES

JANUARY 1 - JUNE 30, 2020

The AWLA commends our Vola Lawson Animal Advocates (VoLAAs) for contributions made from January 1 through June 30, 2020. 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@alexandriaanimals.org.

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2019 Vola Lawson Animal Advocates

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Thank you to everyone who donated in memory or honor of a loved one between January 1 and June 30, 2020. Donations of \$250 or more are recognized in this newsletter.