

A publication of the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria

TAILS

from the

AWLA

June 2021

From the Desk of Stella Hanly

Executive Director of the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria

Anniversaries are a time to reflect on the past and look forward to the future, and as it looks like there is light at the end of the dark COVID-19 tunnel, we are so excited to begin once again to think about our plans for the future.

One of my primary operational goals for the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria (AWLA) when I became Executive Director was to set up the capability to perform surgical procedures on site. Our inability to perform basic spay/neuter and dental procedures at our facility was causing a huge bottleneck in our operations. With the arrival of our mobile surgical and adoption event vehicle, Waggin' Wheels, we were able to meet that goal in spite of all the blockades COVID-19 threw our way.

In the last year we created new relationships with transfer partners, we helped so many animals with complicated medical cases and we exponentially increased our offerings to owned animals in the community with our Pet Pantry and OneHealth initiative, as well as the drive-up, contactless vaccine clinics that we offered through the last year.

So while it's been an unexpected year, there are so many achievements that we as an organization can be proud of!

As we look forward to the next 75 years, we hope in the near future to be able to expand our offerings for pets across the community to include increased assistance with veterinary care, low-cost spay/neuter on site and multiple off-site OneHealth Clinics in the neighborhoods that need us the most.

Our goal is to help as many animals as possible, and in the next 75 years, we will make sure we meet that goal!



CELEBRATING 75 YEARS

75 YEARS

Supporting Animals Across the Community

Seventy-five years ago, 26 Alexandrians came together at the old Chamber of Commerce building out of concern for animals in their community. A key concern was the city's dog "pound" at Monroe and Route 1, where conditions were so deplorable that well-meaning residents occasionally broke in to free the dogs. The group voted to form the AWLA, one of the first nonprofit humane organizations in metropolitan Washington.

June 1946: A charter for the AWLA is drawn up and the organization is officially incorporated. The City of Alexandria permits the AWLA to use city records of dog tags for a large-scale membership drive.

1950: The City of Alexandria provides a desk and phone to the AWLA at the city recreation center. AWLA members begin to set up central files and launch a daily operation.

1950: Groundbreaking starts for the first AWLA shelter, located at 910 S. Payne Street in Old Town.

Jan. 1, 1951: The city turns over supervision of the shelter entirely to the AWLA, providing a budget of more than \$9,000 a year. Soon the group is able to raise \$3,000 to cover veterinarian fees and other shelter needs. Devoted friends donate an "electric refrigerator, inlaid linoleum and furniture" and build special cages for the dogs, cats and kittens set on raised wooden platforms to provide warmth.

Jan. 20, 1951: New shelter opens seven days a week. During the first six months, more than 1,000 animals are handled, and more than 250 are adopted.

1952: Local newspaper story proclaims that the new shelter can "take all animals but snakes and alligators." The story describes the AWLA's rescue of a pregnant deer drowning in the Potomac River and states that "few Alexandrians seem aware of the truly marvelous pets available at the shelter."

January 1952: Minutes of an AWLA meeting summarize the progress made in the shelter's first year, including the following anecdote, relayed by the chairman:

A few Sundays ago we were called to pick up an injured dog out Russell Road. The dog had been hit by a car and one leg almost completely broken off. He was taken immediately to the veterinarian, where a sedative was administered. Fortunately, he had a dog tag on. Our members in the area started efforts to locate the owner, and our shelter operator, Mrs. Mullitt, reached Mr. Sullivan, who through the city's records, was able to give us the owner's name. The owner was notified, and thus was able to save her pet's life. The League is prepared to handle about anything that comes up.

1956: Construction of a new wing of the shelter is approved.

1957: The first edition of the AWLA's newsletter is published.

1969: Edna Cooke is named the first Humane Officer at the AWLA, with authority to investigate and press charges in animal cruelty cases.

1970s: AWLA holds annual "canine games" events, featuring competitions for dogs that take place in Jones Point Park in Old Town Alexandria.

1977: Laws limiting the number of dogs and cats owned by Alexandria City residents take effect.

1983: An ordinance that mandates rabies vaccinations for all cats in the City of Alexandria is passed.



Sept. 1, 1989: City of Alexandria awards the AWLA a contract to oversee all aspects of its animal shelter, including animal care and control, on top of the AWLA's previous responsibilities of animal adoptions, night emergency services, humane education, help for wildlife and other services.

1990: The AWLA presents a plaque to Alexandrian David Perriello after he rescued a sheltie from the frozen Potomac River. Perriello, a TWA employee, waded into the river to retrieve the dog, who had escaped when she was being unloaded from a plane at nearby National Airport.

1996: The AWLA launches its first summer "Animal Camp" for school children, designed to help them understand and appreciate animals. The camp endures today.

1996: The AWLA marks its 50th anniversary, noting that a half-century earlier, only five dogs were adopted from the shelter each month; by 1996, the number had soared to about 100 animals.

2000: Groundbreaking begins for the new Vola Lawson Animal Shelter on Eisenhower Avenue in Alexandria.

May 18, 2002: The Vola Lawson Animal Shelter is dedicated, with former city manager Vola Lawson and other city officials in attendance. The shelter features more spacious and comfortable quarters for staff and, more importantly, the resident animals.



2003: Sarah's Fund is established to help fund medical treatments for shelter animals with extensive veterinary needs.

2011: The AWLA hires its first staff veterinarian, expanding the organization's capacity to help more animals on site in addition to partnering with local veterinary care providers.

May 2015: The AWLA signs a formal agreement with the Alexandria Police Department (APD) to create a working relationship on all animal-related matters in the city of Alexandria. Working with officials, the AWLA brings forward 25 criminal cases of animal abuse and neglect.

The AWLA has a long working relationship with the APD. In the 1950s and 1960s, the AWLA housed the APD's K-9 dogs at the shelter.

May 5, 2018: The AWLA holds its first community Pet Care Fair, offering free pet medical services and supplies to a community in need.



2018: The AWLA exceeds its record for animals transferred in from other locations, more than 600 in total. The animals, who come from areas that lack animal shelters or other resources, find their homes across the metropolitan area.

August 2019: The AWLA launches its Community Programs department, formalizing and expanding several programs with the goal of preventing pets from being surrendered.

2020: The AWLA responds to the global pandemic in several innovative ways, including operating a Pet Pantry that provides 40,000 pounds of pet food and supplies to needy residents over the course of the year.

2021: The AWLA celebrates 75 years of serving its community and looks forward to continued improvement of the lives of animals and people for the next 75!



Waggin' Wheels

THE AWLA IS ON THE MOVE

A new set of wheels, the open road and the feeling that nothing stands between you and helping more animals in need. That is how the AWLA felt when "Waggin' Wheels," the new Mobile Veterinary and Adoption Vehicle, arrived in early 2021. Outfitted with a surgical suite and kennels for animals, the multi-use, 25-foot truck meant new opportunities for the AWLA to help animals at the Vola Lawson Animal Shelter and connect with the community.



Waggin' Wheels, the AWLA's Mobile Veterinary and Event vehicle

An eight-year-old gray and white cat named Biscuit got things rolling. He was the first animal to undergo surgery at Waggin' Wheels' surgical suite in April. All Biscuit knew is that his mouth was causing him pain, and when he woke up, the pain was gone. But Biscuit soon was just one of many animals to receive critical on-site surgical care, marking the start of the AWLA's expanded capabilities to help animals receive necessary and life-changing care.

AWLA Staff Veterinarian Dr. Erica Caldwell was integral to the AWLA's purchase and outfitting of the vehicle, and she performed the first surgeries. "We've been fortunate to work in the past with several veterinary providers who've donated their time and expertise to ensure our adoptable animals receive the care they need," said Caldwell, "but this mobile surgery means we can take on the routine surgeries, so our partners can focus on the animals needing specialized care."

Waggin' Wheels made its community debut at The Dog Days in Del Ray First Thursday event in May, and has been spotted around town since. "We're looking forward to reconnecting with more of our community, and in locations where it's convenient for them to find us," said AWLA Executive Director Stella Hanly. "We can't wait to host adoption events on the waterfront, swing by schools to help students learn more about animal welfare and just generally be where people want to meet us."

So if you see Waggin' Wheels rolling down your street, you'll know it's on its way to help animals and all the people who care for them.

We have been actively involved with the AWLA for 15+ years now, taking part in or helping to organize events like the Black Tie and Tails gala, the Olde Towne Dogge Walke, the St. Patrick's Day Fun Dog Show and more! These are fun events to support the serious work that is done at the shelter. It has been amazing to see supporters rally behind the AWLA throughout the years. With the dedicated staff and the leadership of the Board of Directors, I'm confident the AWLA will continue its mission of improving the lives of the animals and the people of our fair city for another 75 years and many, many more! Thank you, AWLA, for all you do!

- Shannon and Bobby Mahoney, The Mahoney Group LLC



CELEBRATING 75



I will forever be grateful to the AWLA for the incredible work they do in our community and the joy they have brought to my life. After losing our previous rescue dog to cancer, we began fostering for AWLA. We happily foster-failed and adopted Nori, an incredibly sweet dog who makes us smile every day and is always happy to see me, no matter how I vote on controversial issues. AWLA has not only helped us and Nori, but tens of thousands of people find new family members — congratulations on an amazing 75 years!

- Elizabeth Bennett-Parker, Vice Mayor of Alexandria

Alexandria Celebrates in Style

On a warm Saturday in late June, community members flooded to the AWLA to commemorate 75 years of helping animals across the city and throughout the region with the Pours for Paws cocktail event. Featuring wine tastings from Rough Day Wines and beer flights from Port City Brewing Company, guests had the chance to tour the facility, meet adoptable animals, enjoy appetizers from Meggrolls and Nothing Bundt Cakes and bid for auction items from a wide variety of local businesses.

"We couldn't have come this far without the support of our community," said Development Director Ashlee Droscher. "We're not celebrating us; we're celebrating what we can do because of their dedication and generosity."

Special guests included local members of the City Council, top donors and volunteers, along with AWLA adoptable animals in their best formal dress.

The event was made possible by generous sponsors including Caudron Megary Blackburn, Priority Automotive, Tito's Vodka, The Nellis Group, VCA Animal Hospitals, Tactical Land Care, Beyer Subaru, Dog Latin Dog Training, Tech Painting Company, Inc., Whole Dogz and Nothing Bundt Cakes.

"A lot has changed in 75 years, but not the love that Alexandrians feel for animals, and for the AWLA," said Executive Director Stella Hanly. "This event gave us another reason to celebrate and to look forward to the next 75!"

The Animal Welfare League of Alexandria has made such a difference in the lives of animals and people across our city. Their work has helped tens of thousands of animals find homes over the last 75 years, but they've also helped keep animals in their homes, with their families, through programs like their Community Pet Pantry and Crisis Care. Alexandria is an amazing home for animal lovers, and the work of the AWLA has played a significant part in shaping our community.

- Hoffman Town Center

Over the last 32 years, the AWLA has been a great partner for the City of Alexandria government in providing reliable and high-quality services to residents, becoming an integral part of the Alexandria community. The planning and design of the Vola Lawson Animal Shelter, completed in 2002, is a monument to our long standing public-private partnership. AWLA continues to work hand in hand with the City to ensure the safety of residents and animals and provide services to enhance Alexandrians' quality of life. The City of Alexandria congratulates AWLA on their 75th anniversary and looks forward to many years of continued paws-itive collaboration.

- Mark Jinks, Alexandria City Manager

Dog Catchers No More!

As you read on pages 2 and 3, the AWLA has changed and grown in the last 75 years, in the services we provide, the way we connect with our community and the expanded efforts to help animals and the people who love them. Growing and changing alongside us, now serving as part of our team, is the AWLA's Animal Services team.

Just as early shelter facilities were considered "the pound," the "dog catcher" loomed large through the early 20th century. In comic strips and cartoon movies of the time, the dog catcher could be seen rounding up animals, both stray and sometimes even pets, to take to the shelter. In some contexts, they were synonymous with corruption or incompetence. "You couldn't even be elected as dog catcher" was not an uncommon insult.

But as the AWLA diverged from "the pound," our "dog catchers" changed their role with the times as well. In 1989, "animal control services" became part of the AWLA's contract with the City of Alexandria; along with offering in-shelter adoptions, the AWLA provided services outside the facility, with our Animal Control Officers assisting with trapped or injured wildlife, responding to concerns about potentially dangerous or endangered animals, and, yes, picking up found animals, with the goal of reconnecting them with their families.

These days, the AWLA's Animal Services team does even more than the Animal Control officers of the 1990s and early 2000s. As the field of animal welfare has advanced to focus on both animals and humans, so have the efforts of Animal Services. Our officers aren't focused on the punitive; their goal is to help and educate. Rather than assuming that the owner of an unleashed dog is intentionally breaking the law, our officers ask, Do you know that dogs need to be leashed here? Do you have a leash? Could we provide you with one? Our officers take part in school and library programs, as well as providing fun and educational "Animal Assistance" training as part of the AWLA's popular summer camp. When we receive a call about an animal who appears to be neglected, Animal Services asks for more information. Perhaps an owner is doing the best they can for their pet on a limited budget, but if our officers can help out by connecting them with our Community Programs department to provide food or emergency grooming, they can make all the difference by helping an owner keep a pet who loves them.

The AWLA's Animal Services officers are just one piece of a city-wide team focused on keeping Alexandria safer for its residents. As part of Alexandria's Domestic Violence Intervention Program task force, we know that more than 90% of the time, animal abuse in a household indicates that a human is being abused as well. By working closely with Alexandria's police and sheriff's departments and the City and Commonwealth's attorneys, we can be involved from the beginning in instances of abuse or neglect, helping determine how to assist the animals and humans involved and, as appropriate, seeing the situation through to a court case and prosecution.

Seventy-five years after the AWLA's founding, our Animal Services team works with dogs but also cats, raccoons and birds, deer and squirrels and opossums, and of course, humans. They are no longer the dog catchers. They are first responders, and they are community liaisons. They are assisters and providers. They are part of the AWLA's larger footprint of community resources, and they — we — are here to help!



Alexandria's Animal Services Officers

Destina Studios



Vola [Lawson] encouraged me to join the Board of Directors, and the AWLA will always be a part of my extended family, whether through adopting dogs or cats, or donating products, services, money, or just being a good ol' volunteer. During my tenure on the board, including as Board Chair, I had the good fortune to work with Vola and many talented and high-spirited board members and staff members and was proud to work to create a strong and fulfilling relationship with the City of Alexandria, a key stakeholder to the success of the shelter and its future. Our community is very proud of the AWLA and what it stands for.... our community is known for their compassion for animals, our community supports the dedication and commitment of the AWLA. May we all raise a glass of cheer and a paw....to 75 more years of resounding support for AWLA, its staff and volunteers. We applaud you AWLA, keep up the good work.

- *Charlotte Hall, Former AWLA Board Member*

The Next Generation of Animal Advocates

The future guardians of animal welfare aren't just playing with animals. Students participating in the AWLA's Humane Education program learn about empathy and advocacy, introducing learners of all ages to the variety of ways people work with and help animals. Through events and workshops and online lectures, they transform a love of animals into an opportunity for community service and personal growth. Having a furry companion present is pretty exciting too!

Helping children learn how to safely interact with animals is nothing new. But today, Humane Education is developing into a more structured field, where animal shelters, public schools and even volunteer-run organizations can access materials that have been proven to help students develop personally and intellectually through social and emotional learning.

So what is Humane Education? "That's what the field of Humane Education is trying to figure out," says AWLA Humane Educator Carly Mercer. "We work with teachers nationwide to create a universal definition of Humane Education and share ideas on ways to measure the effectiveness of programs." Studies show that children who treat animals with kindness and empathize with their needs can grow up to be more emotionally intelligent adults, and that mistreatment of animals can be indicative of larger familial and socio-emotional issues. Having programs that can intervene early — like a humane education program in that child's school — can have long-lasting positive effects.

Such a developmentally essential program looks much simpler in practice and takes place during summer camps, school trips, online classes, birthday parties and more. "With younger students, we learn about body language. What is this dog trying to tell you? Is what you're doing making that animal uncomfortable?" Mercer explains. As these young learners grow, they are encouraged to share what they learn with friends, siblings, family, even adults. "An adult really listens when a child tells them that the way they're greeting a new dog might be making that dog uncomfortable. We tell them how important it is to speak up for animals who can't speak for themselves."

With older students, the AWLA's Humane Education program grows with them. Conversations change from animal body language and respecting wild animals' space to how you can use your learning to create change in animal welfare and what a career in the field might look like. "In third grade, everyone wants to be a veterinarian," says Mercer, "and we need veterinarians. But if you go into communications, policy work or even accounting, the work you do can still help an animal. Encouraging this mindset for students already eager to help animals is how we help the next generation use their hard work and education to create change that is important to them."

Visit AlexandriaAnimals.org/HumaneEducation to learn more about our virtual and in-person programs for students of all ages.



Queenie greets students during a class at the AWLA.



Naomi visits with AWLA campers.



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Monthly Donors Making a Difference

Every month, a select group of passionate animal advocates makes the decision to impact the life of an animal. These supporters make a monthly donation to the AWLA, ranging in size and purpose, but each with the goal of changing a life.

By donating monthly, you give the AWLA the ability to plan ahead. You help us better estimate the funds dedicated to help animals and drive the programming that supports our community. Whether your donation is \$5, \$15 or \$50, your consistency gives us the anticipated support we need to go above and beyond for each new animal who comes through our doors...no matter what their needs.

When you become a monthly donor with the AWLA, you'll receive a special welcome packet and regular updates about how your continued gifts are helping advance our mission. You'll also receive information and invitations to special events, such as our recent Pours for Paws 75th anniversary celebration. And best of all, you won't have to worry about when it's time to make your next donation — it's already scheduled!

"A monthly donation is yet another way to be able to help advance the mission. It is a recurring charge that is easy to set up and is taken care of each month!" shared Lisa-Marie DiGiulio, a monthly donor.

"I know that my monthly donation is being used to further the assistance that our community animals need. I highly recommend setting up a monthly donation — no matter the amount — every little bit helps!"

To learn more about becoming a monthly donor and to start giving monthly, visit AlexandriaAnimals.org/MonthlyGiving.

How does one describe a place of work that is so much more? A friend, a mentor, a community and a family. A teacher, a coach and a guide. I found my calling at the AWLA. I learned how to help animals and the people who care for them and in turn, they helped me. And, when the time came to pursue new adventures, I left knowing the AWLA would always be my "forever family." Congratulations to the AWLA on 75 years of helping animals and the people of the City of Alexandria and beyond! I am so proud to be a small part of your story!

- Former AWLA employee



Coming Fall 2021

Visit AlexandriaAnimals.org/LoveYourPetDay
for more information.

I have lived in Alexandria for over 40 years and chose to volunteer at AWLA after my retirement because it is passionate about its mission to find loving families for so many homeless animals. I'm so glad to participate in the volunteer opportunities including: working with the toughest pups, to helping get them adopted, to training new volunteers, as well as delivering pet food to needy senior Alexandria residents. It has been my way to give back to our community, and I am thrilled to work with the AWLA to make that possible!

- Dan Bernstein, AWLA volunteer