

# Humane society seeks 'Seniors for Seniors'

By MARY TIEFENBRUNN

**T**he Champaign County Humane Society has operated an animal shelter and pet-adoption program for 70 years. It accepts dogs, cats and small-animal pets of all ages.

At the shelter, the animals receive all the necessities — food, water, and shelter — plus veterinary care, TLC from staff and volunteers, and most importantly, the chance for a new loving home through the Society's pet-adoption program.

The humane society offers our community a variety of programs that support responsible pet ownership and promote the benefits of the human-animal bond. For example, a dedicated staff member takes calls from adopters and pet owners needing help with animal training and behavior; dog-training and puppy-socialization classes are offered year-round to give owners the skills required to raise well-mannered and well-adjusted dogs; humane investigators respond to calls about animal neglect or abuse in the community; and a humane educator takes animals on monthly visits to senior-living facilities.

The humane society also has a "Seniors for Seniors" program, through which qualified applicants, age 60 and older, can adopt a cat or dog that is 10 years or older, with no adoption fee. The program provides a win-win for pets that are often overlooked by adopters seeking puppies or kittens and seniors who lack the tolerance for the chaos of raising young pets.

For older animals, living with an older adult who has ample time for daily interaction is the perfect "retirement." Older dogs and cats really enjoy a quiet lifestyle and lots of lap time. Win!

Pets can provide a form of social contact for anyone. Many older adults find their social world shrinking as they age, and studies have shown that the companionship of a dog or cat can provide them with comfort, a sense of purpose and a reason to stay active and engaged.

Companion animals can also improve physical and mental health. By adopting a new "best friend," studies have shown that you might experience the benefits of decreased heart rate and blood pressure. Win!

Cats can be loving companions to many older adults. Older cats, in particular, are happy to spend their days indoors, proving comfort and affection to their humans. They can be an excellent choice for individuals with mobility limitations.

Dogs, on the other hand, motivate their owners to engage in regular physical activity, which is extremely important to maintaining health in the later years. Whether playing fetch, going on a walk or spending time in the yard, dogs force us to stay active. Many older owners also find that walking the dog keeps them engaged with their neighbors. Thus, dogs are



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Feline residents are shown in April 2023 at the Champaign County Humane Society's new facility on the western edge of Champaign.


great companions for those who need a little nudge to remain physically and socially engaged.

Some older adults are hesitant to get a pet because they are concerned their pet might outlive them and they worry about what would happen. The humane society hates to see this be a barrier to adoption when they have so many gentle adult cats in the shelter just waiting for a lap to sit on! If this is a concern of yours, the society offers several tips to ease your mind.

While you are still healthy, identify a friend or family member who is willing and able to take responsibility for your animal after your death. If there is nobody who can promise to become your pet's new owner, perhaps a friend or family member will at least agree to take care of your pet's immediate needs upon your death or hospitalization, and then will find a suitable home for your pet, or take them to an animal shelter with a good reputation and adoption program.

You can also leave arrangements for your pets in your estate-planning documents. Illinois allows you to create a "pet trust" that provides directives and financial support for your pets after you are gone.

As a nonprofit, the Champaign County Humane Society relies on the support of volunteers and donors to achieve its mission. Retired adults represent a significant portion of the volunteers and donors at the society! Whether walking dogs, cleaning cages or helping with animal socialization, volunteers are instrumental to the mission of the humane society.

While the society's mission is to support the needs of the animals in our community, it also has programs and opportunities for you. Pets can bring a great deal of love and joy to your life, and you can do the same for them. Whether you are looking for a new furry friend or a way to give back to your community, consider the humane society. 

*Mary Tiefenbrunn is executive director of the Champaign County Humane Society.*