



Our Animals

The Magazine of the San Francisco SPCA

Summer 2023

Vol. 115, No. 2

sfspca.org



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The San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

201 Alabama Street, San Francisco, CA 94103 | (415) 554-3000
Founded April 18, 1868

Our Mission

Our mission is to ensure every companion animal has access to quality medical care, compassionate shelter, and a loving home.

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CEO's Message:



Summer is here, and we're celebrating more than sunshine, outdoor fun, and holiday getaways. As many of you know, 2023 is a remarkable San Francisco SPCA milestone: our 155th anniversary.

Throughout our history, the animals in our care have benefitted tremendously from community support. Over the decades, you've given us something truly special: the privilege to serve the animals of San Francisco and lend a hand where it's needed beyond the borders of our city.

In this issue of *Our Animals*, you'll read about one of our most successful and far-reaching partnerships, the California Humane Animal Transfer Team, or CHATT. Already in its fifth year, this coalition of Bay Area and Central California shelters is making a lasting difference for animals and pet guardians across the state.

We'll also introduce you to our vet tech nursing supervisor, Cathy Alcaraz, RVT, who shares how vital community medicine spay and neuter programs are to animal welfare; you'll learn how we helped a territorial terrier named Micah transform into an "America's Favorite Dog" finalist; and we say goodbye to longtime supporter and dear friend, Grace Perkins.

We will always be here for the animals and pet guardians of San Francisco. Beyond that, our capacity to be a good neighbor, which you, and decades of supporters like you, have made possible, is something truly worth celebrating.

Thank you for being there to support our work to do right by animals, people, and our world.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "JAS", written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jennifer Scarlett, DVM
CEO

CHATT Celebrates Five Years of Lifesaving Partnership



In the summer of 2020, an outbreak of distemper tore through the Tulare County Animal Services shelter in California's agricultural Central Valley region. This highly contagious disease can lead to irreversible nervous-system damage and death if it's left untreated. The sudden flare-up brought the facility to a near standstill.

Cassie Heffington, Tulare County Animal Services Manager, was desperate for a solution. When a consulting veterinarian recommended euthanizing every dog in the shelter, she knew it was time to reach out to her partners in the California Humane Animal Transfer Team, or CHATT.

What is CHATT?

CHATT is a coalition of San Francisco Bay Area and central California shelters that share lifesaving resources and support where and when they're needed most. Launched as an SF SPCA pilot in 2018, the program has grown over the past five years to become one of our most successful animal-welfare initiatives.

When the distemper outbreak threatened to ravage the Tulare shelter population, Cassie reached out to CHATT partner Dr. Jennifer Scarlett. "When I called Dr. Scarlett," Cassie said, "first, she first talked me down from the panic. I knew euthanizing every dog in the shelter wasn't the solution, but I didn't know where to find the resources we needed. Together, we worked through what needed to happen."

Within 24 hours of Cassie's call, the SF SPCA and CHATT partner Silicon Valley Humane Society sent teams of veterinarians to Tulare to test and treat all 90 dogs for the disease. The quick response spared the shelter a devastating blow and is the kind of lifesaving teamwork that gives us cause to celebrate five years of this amazing program.

Helping partner shelters when and where help is needed most.

CHATT partners combine resources to assist fellow partners with spay and neuter surgeries, routine and acute

veterinary medicine, grant writing and funding, legal aid, shelter operations, crisis support, and, the program's namesake, animal transfers.

Twice weekly, Adoptions Manager Marti Watts brings animals from central California shelters to the SF SPCA. It's a win-win for all—San Francisco has more hopeful pet guardians than adoptable animals, while budget restraints and economic hardship leave our Central Valley partners struggling to accommodate the volume of animals in their shelters.

"It's a huge sense of relief when Marti comes," Cassie said. "The staff here is in constant anxiety, with kennels filling up and us having to make tough decisions. When she leaves, we're left with six or seven kennels open. We feel like we can breathe again."

Five years of helping animals—and the people who care for them.

Of all the support CHATT provides, Cassie said that connecting with others who understand the stresses of shelter life is one of the most valuable parts of the partnership. "This job can be lonely," she shared. "Sometimes, being able to talk to someone in this world who is not in crisis has pulled me out of a cycle of panic, so I can solve the problems we need to solve."

Dr. Scarlett points out the exceptional work done at Central Valley shelters and the role Bay Area partners play to relieve their stress. "Everyone is working so hard," she said. "Sometimes they get underwater and we help release the valve a little, so they can maintain the community programs that help keep animals in their homes."

"It doesn't feel like charity," said Cassie. "They really partner with us to work out similar issues."

Exciting plans for the next five years.

Dr. Scarlett says the next five years will focus on access to care. In Central Valley veterinary-resource deserts, some pet guardians live as far as an hour and a half away from basic care. "We give shelters room to work on programs that improve access to care in their communities."

With the support of funders and donors, including a significant grant from Cal for All Animals, the SF SPCA will send teams to provide spay and neuter clinics for partner shelters in the Central Valley to help reduce overpopulation. "If we can take spay and neuter to communities that are



isolated from veterinary services," Cassie said, "we might see some actual progress over the next five years."

If you would like to support the ongoing impact of access-to-care programs like CHATT, please visit sfspca.org/donate and donate today! 🐾

Correction

In the Spring 2023 edition of Our Animals, we mistakenly reported some facts in our article titled, "Caring for Animals Since 1868." The paragraph should have read as follows:

Animal-centered sheltering

In 1989, with Rich Avanzino at the helm, we ended our 100-year contract as the city's animal-control service provider. Five years later, our new partnership with animal control made San Francisco the nation's first "no-kill" city. 🐾

Making a Difference: Because Everyone Deserves to Love a Pet

Cathy Alcaraz, RVT
Veterinary Technician
Nursing Supervisor

How long have you worked at the SF SPCA?

Seven years.

Do you have pets?

An old pug named Zoe; Angel, a Pekinese adopted from the SF SPCA; and two Siamese-mix cats, Brady and 17-year-old Chelsea.

What one word embodies the SF SPCA for you?

Support.

Why did you choose to become a veterinary technician?

When I was a kid, I always liked animals. When I was in high school, I started volunteering at the San Francisco Zoo. In college, I had an internship there, running the nature trail and training volunteers to handle animals. Later, I was a wildlife vet tech, and I managed the Sulphur Creek Nature Center before I started working in a veterinary hospital.

What made you switch focus from wildlife to companion animals?

It's the bond between pets and their guardians. It's amazing—and frightening—how much animals mean to their guardians, and how much pets love their people. I remember asking one woman if she'd like me to check her cat's blood work before we did a



dental procedure. She said, "Of course I do! I have tea with this cat every morning. I don't know what I would do without her." That's what got me.

What's a typical day for you at the SF SPCA?

I supervise nursing in spays and neuters for our community medicine programs. On a typical day, we start by checking in approximately 25 patients. They come in one by one for their exams with the doctor, then we house them while they wait for surgery.

Then, I'll assign roles for the day, and when surgery starts, I lead that flow. We do about 30–34 animals a day at low or no cost. On top of our public spaying and neutering, we'll do about 7–8 community cats each day.

What's your favorite part of your work?

The Mobile Vaccine Clinic. My heart is in community medicine; and providing free vaccines and flea control to the public is what I enjoy so much. The cost of going to the vet



and getting vaccines and flea control isn't in everyone's reach. When people skip it, they might not realize that one vaccine can save a puppy's life, especially with Parvo.

Seeing people's joy when they bring their cats and dogs to the mobile clinic is so rewarding. They say, "I'm so glad you're here, because I wouldn't be able to afford to get vaccines or go to the vet." People will pack up to six cats in a car (in crates) and bring them out for flea control. We also make appointments for low-cost spay or neuter services, and, later, we'll see families with their pets in the lobby at our hospital. They're so happy to see us. It's nice to see that full circle.

I love seeing how dedicated people are to their animals and how much they want to make their lives better.

How do you think our low- and no-cost spay and neuter services benefit the community?

Surgery is a big financial decision. We make it so much easier for that to happen. If someone gets a puppy from a family member and finds out they have to spend close to a thousand dollars on a surgery, they might skip that. But eventually, you run out of friends, family, and neighbors to give puppies to, and you can't keep putting them in your backyard. This program helps keep animals out of the shelter and in their homes.

Some people think neutering an animal will negatively affect its health or alter its personality, and we share that's not what we have seen. In the case of cats, people might not realize the surgery will prevent a male cat from marking in the house (you can't get that smell out of anything!), and a female cat in heat from eventually finding a way to get out of the house.

What else do you want people to know about the SF SPCA?

We're here for you. We're improving access to care with low- and no-cost spay and neuter services and low-cost preventative treatments, because everyone deserves to love a pet. 🐾

Celebrating the Human-Animal Bond

Stories of the love we share with pets are as unique as the people who tell them, and the animals who inspire us. Here, our donors, staff, and volunteers share the pets who live in their hearts and homes.

Call for submissions!

Tell us what your pet teaches you, how you found each other, and, most important, what makes your relationship special.

Send your submission and a high-res photo of you with your pet to publicrelations@sfsPCA.org (subject line: "Our Animals Submission").

Rebecca W. & Scout

Little did I know when we adopted Scout years ago as our second dog, that she would soon become my sole companion, best friend, comfort, and joy. I had an incredibly difficult year in 2018, with significant grief and loss. I don't know how I would have survived that time without her. She got me through divorce and losing my parents, a close friend, our home, and my job. Through it all, she was by my side with constant love and affection. From Scout, I have learned about living in the moment, greeting each day with optimism and joy, and showing kindness, love, and affection to all the beings in my life. Her unconditional love, loyalty, kisses, goofiness, and quirky smile bring me joy every day, and I can't imagine my life without her.



Bharat V., Tonia D. & Homer and Donut

Homer and Donut were the last of their litter. Homer had early signs of elbow dysplasia, and Donut needed dental work. No one wanted dogs with medical issues, which is why they remained unadopted. We believed we could give them a thriving, loving life with the veterinary care they needed. In many ways, we thought we were fixing them, but, more deeply, they fixed parts of us too.

Our pets are family members who mean everything to us. No matter what's happening, everyone is always happy to see each other. Our pets have taught us boundless capacity to love, forgiveness for things that have happened in the past, and unwavering commitment to enjoying food.

Chiara F. & Duncan

Duncan is my spicy little potato man. He's a stray from San Antonio, Texas. There's a saying that you get the dog you need, not the dog you want. I'm naturally a big-dog person—Duncan is 30 pounds, and he's thrown a lot of curve balls at me.

Patience and communication are what he's taught me above all, because I've had to take it slow with him. The person who had him before me used a shock collar, so I had a lot of trust rebuilding to do. Now, when I leave him with a sitter and come back, I can see his joy. He's gaining so much confidence as a city dog, and I see him navigate spaces with trust that I have his back, and he has mine. It's great to see that happen in real-time.



David S. & Oleeo

We adopted Oleeo from the San Francisco SPCA when he was one year old. Our daughter, who was six at the time, used to call Cheerios “Oleeos,” and we thought it would be a fun name. He perked right up when we tried it out, as if to say, “Hey, I like this!”

We always say the world needs more Oleeo. He's perpetually happy and always assumes everybody's best intentions. There are times he is a protector, too, and he reminds me of my grandmother; he doesn't want anybody doing anything dangerous like riding a bike or skateboarding. Mostly, he's all smiles, free and fun. When things get stressful, we tell each other, “Be like Oleeo. Just smile and let your heart be light.”

Genevieve M. & Luna

Luna has kept all my secrets since I was nine years old. She knows when I'm sad and will dutifully curl up for snuggles. When I'm stressed, she gives me space—except when it's dinner time. Then the real priorities kick in.

Luna is a loyal female who knows what she wants. She follows the warmth from my bed to the heater to a sun beam—a lifestyle I am trying to replicate. I love my Luna and her little snores and gifts of hair all over my sweaters!



Behavior Troubles? We Can Help

SF SPCA Behavior Team delivers 97% improvement rates after just one visit.

Many behaviors we see in our companion animals are normal reactions to their environment, and patience and understanding can address most issues. However, when behaviors exceed normal expectations, it's a good idea to seek professional help.

SF SPCA's Behavior team, led by board-certified veterinary behaviorist Dr. Wailani Sung, offers top-tier support for your pet's behavior problems. Serving more than 1,000 clients annually, we provide expert care and guidance for any behavioral concern you might face.

Case Study: Micah

Challenge:

Fear-induced anxiety leading to territorial aggression

As wirehaired fox terrier Micah settled into his new home, guardians Rick Potts and Rich Sommers noticed a troubling shift in his behavior. The handsome little dog became increasingly protective of what he perceived to be his territory—including the public hallways and lobby of the



building he lived in. To make matters worse, walks in their bustling, family-friendly neighborhood deteriorated as he began lunging at small children, other dogs, and skateboards.

Treatment:

Medical workup, anxiety medication, and behavior modification

First, we ruled out any medical condition that might cause Micah to be in pain and lash out. Then, we prescribed and monitored medication to treat the pup's fear-induced anxiety and depression. Finally, we taught Rick and Rich to use distraction and eye contact to de-escalate Micah's aggression, while rewarding good behavior.

Results:

America's Favorite Dog

The couple shared, "We no longer have to look at the cameras to make sure the lobby and garage are clear or keep him on a short leash before opening the door. He's genuinely happier and loves being around other dogs and people. He's even an 'America's Favorite Dog' contest semi-finalist! We're so grateful to the behavior team; we look forward to our sessions because we learn so much." 🐾

Why Choose SF SPCA's Behavior Team?

- Bay Area's largest, most qualified behavior-resource center
- Two months of behavioral support included with each treatment plan
- Humane, evidence-based training techniques
- Space to practice working with difficult behaviors
- With vet referral, pet insurance might cover consultations

Learn more at sfspca.org/behavior.



2023 Gala Wags Tails, Warms Hearts

Thank you to everyone who joined us this past April 18th at our 155th anniversary celebration, Tails of the Heart. We are excited to report that the joyful fundraising event exceeded our goal and raised \$1.5 million to support our mission to ensure that every San Francisco companion animal has access to quality medical care, compassionate shelter, and a loving home.

The fete was attended by more than 300 animal-loving guests at our Mission Street headquarters. Partygoers were greeted on the red carpet by SF SPCA Animal Assisted Therapy dogs and later visited with our animals who are currently available for adoption.

The evening included a ceremony to honor CHATT partner Cassandra Heffington, Animal Services Manager at Tulare County Animal Services; a cocktail reception; a plant-based dinner; a lively auction; and a late-night “Wooftop” party at nearby Dandelion Chocolate Factory.

“As we kick off our 155th year, we are focused on ensuring that access to veterinary services is equitable for all and that the most under-resourced animals can receive care,” said SF SPCA CEO, Dr. Jennifer Scarlett. “The undaunted, generous support of our community has allowed us to meet the current animal welfare crisis head-on and lead the next frontier in animal welfare.” 🐾





201 Alabama Street
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Change service requested.

Remembering Grace Perkins

Beloved Community Member and Donor

With love and admiration in our hearts, we pay tribute to a woman whose commitment to animals was matched only by her devotion to family and community. Longtime SF SPCA supporter and our friend, Grace Perkins, passed away this past February.

As Trustee of the Winifred Johnson Clive Foundation and recipient of our 2020 Partnership in Fundraising Award, Grace was instrumental in supporting our Animal Assisted Therapy program and monthly Mobile Vaccine Clinics.

According to her son, current Foundation Trustee Jonathan Perkins, Grace was as fond of our work as she was of our people. “The SF SPCA was a warm and emotional place for her,” he said. “I don’t think there was a program she didn’t like. She knew the same cast of characters for years, and she really liked working with them.”

Jon shared that, while Grace was professionally oriented throughout her life, her true joy was giving back to animals



and other causes. “She was so focused her entire life,” he said. “When she stopped working, that focus turned to her passion for animals. It was her calling.” 🐾