

Arizona Humane Society: For the Love of Animals

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Friday, 03 May 2013 10:48 - Last Updated Friday, 03 May 2013 10:54

Taking in 100-plus animals daily, the Arizona Humane Society is on a mission to improve animals' lives, alleviate their suffering and elevate their status in society.



Whether it's the fact that they take in and help care for more than 44,000 homeless animals annually, or established the first Emergency Animal Medical Technician (EAMT) program in the country, or operate the largest shelter-based hospital in the Southwest, the Arizona Humane Society (AHS) has been recognized as a leader for the improvement of the lives of animals. "We are committed to giving pets a second chance at a good life while also doing what is best for pets and the people in their lives," says Bretta Nelson, public relations manager for AHS.

Established in 1957 by a passionate group of volunteers, AHS is the largest nonprofit animal welfare and protection agency in the state. The group also aids in the relief of natural disasters, including the Wallow and Monument Fires. As an open-intake shelter, AHS will accept any animal—it doesn't matter what breed, age or medical condition an animal has; it exists to take in cases of abuse, neglect, injury, illness and behavioral concerns.

People often have the misconception that AHS just hosts adoptions. It actually offers a variety of services: low-cost spay/neuter and vaccination clinics; animal-rescue and cruelty investigation; humane education programs; volunteer and foster care programs; and hosts thrift stores, a retail and adoption center (Petique) as well as many programs for alternative placement of animals.

The duties at AHS can be extremely stressful and difficult, but as the lead veterinarian at AHS, Kathleen Croteau says it is all worth the effort. "It is extremely gratifying to see a patient that suffered through a horrible trauma make continuous improvements in our hospital, go into a foster home for TLC and recovery, then return for adoption and find a new home," Croteau says. One of her most rewarding moments was being an expert witness in a felony conviction for animal cruelty where an individual stabbed a dog with a knife, tied his legs with duct tape and threw the dog onto the freeway. The dog was able to heal from its wounds and found a new home with a couple who were inspired by his story and ended up opening a shelter when they moved out of state.

Recently, AHS has been focused on its spay and neuter initiatives to decrease the number of animals suffering on the streets as well as increasing the amount of adoptions. Last fiscal year, AHS provided more than 20,000 spay and neuter surgeries and, in 2011, launched a program in partnership with the Animal Defense League of Arizona to help combat the increasing free-roaming cat population.

Manager of volunteer services, Sharon Kinsella, takes pride in the volunteer program, finding it a privilege to be a daily witness to the compassion at AHS. "We have 1,800 wonderful souls [volunteers] who lend a hand to help the animals each year," Kinsella says.

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Arizona Humane Society www.azhumane.org.