

## SHELTER SPOTLIGHT

# COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY IS KEY TO CINCINNATI SHELTER'S SUCCESS

## STATS

At SPCA Cincinnati, a wide array of programs designed to help animals and humans — and strengthen the bond between them — has made this innovative shelter a model for collaboration and constructive community involvement.

*Collaboration. Community involvement. Strengthening the human-animal bond.* Each of these, standing alone, would constitute a critical element in the day-to-day work — and overall success — of any animal welfare organization. At SPCA Cincinnati, all three components come together in a number of programs and creative collaborations designed to connect and enhance the lives of the animals and people they touch.

According to Harry Dates, president and CEO of SPCA Cincinnati, that dovetail effect is something the shelter works diligently to cultivate. “Our object is to make the community more aware of how animals help humans, and to help people develop respect for animals. Ideally, that carries over into how we treat each other.”

## A CARING COLLABORATION

One of the shelter's most innovative — and successful — programs was developed precisely to help achieve that ideal by strengthening the bond between mistreated humans and homeless animals. The Strategic Humane Intervention Program (SHIP) is the result of a unique collaboration between SPCA Cincinnati, Cincinnati Children's Medical Center, the YWCA and local domestic violence shelters. Facilitated by SPCA personnel, SHIP teaches abused women and their children to clicker-train shelter dogs. The trainers come to the shelter one week before the start of each six-week session and select dogs that were strays or turned in due to behavior problems. Groups of six to 10 families then teach the dogs basic commands, using metal “clicker” toys to get the dogs' attention and rewarding them for correct responses.

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| LOCATION:                               | Main: Sharonville Humane Center and Shelter<br>11900 Conrey Rd.<br>Cincinnati, Ohio 45249  |
| FULL-TIME STAFF:                        | 61   |
| PART-TIME STAFF:                        | 4  |
| VOLUNTEERS:                             | 300 (50+ regulars)   |
| ANIMALS HANDLED PER YEAR:               | 17,383 in 2008 (7,611 dogs, 8,987 cats and 785 other)  |
| YEARS IN OPERATION:                     | 136  |
| BASIC DEMOGRAPHICS OF COMMUNITY SERVED: | Population of approximately 842,000 within 460,000-square-mile Hamilton County. Primarily urban/suburban with some rural. The median household income is \$48,435. |

## SERVICES:

Spay/neuter clinic, investigations and inspections, lost/found/receiving, ambulance services, animal control, wildlife rescue, licensing, obedience training, adoptions, Companion Animal Access Program, humane education, foster program, mobile adoption unit, Pets for People, Strategic Humane Intervention Program.

## ADOPTION FEES:

Puppies 6 months and under — \$123.75; dogs over 6 months — \$103.75. Fee includes license, physical exam, temperament evaluation, vaccinations, wormer, heartworm test, microchip, 30 days of complimentary pet health insurance and spay/neuter.

Kittens 6 months and under — \$110; cats over 6 months — \$90. Fee includes physical exam, temperament evaluation, vaccinations, wormer, test for feline leukemia, microchip, 30 days of complimentary pet health insurance and spay/neuter. (Now offering two-for-one cat and kitten adoptions on day of adoption only.)

## COMPUTER SYSTEM/SOFTWARE:

Shelter Buddy

## FUNDRAISING:

The shelter receives no tax money to operate and relies upon private donations from events such as the Adopt-A-Pet Fund telethon, annual Fur Ball fundraiser, Doggie Dash dog walk along the Ohio River and Reindog Parade dog walk/costume contest each December.

## SPCA CINCINNATI BY THE NUMBERS

- Main facility purchased in 2001, opened in 2008; Northside facility built in 1964
- 42,000 square feet (main); 26,000 square feet (Northside)
- Main facility features:
  - 5-foot-wide aisles and high ceiling in kennel area
  - Skylights in kennel and cattery
  - Heated kennel/cattery floors
  - Tempered safety-glass kennel doors
  - Two courtyards (one with artificial Easy Turf)
  - 26 air-handling systems
  - 250-seat auditorium with state-of-the-art sound and video systems
  - Digital X-ray machine
  - Mobile adoption/surgery rescue unit

## ON THE HORIZON

- Expansion of main facility to include 20,000 additional square feet of kennels and cattery
- Renovation of 25-acre farm to create large-animal rehabilitation facility and dog park



Mike Retzlaff, SPCA Cincinnati's development director, was in on the ground floor when SHIP was introduced 10 years ago as a pilot program. Since then, he has witnessed the program's remarkable effect on its human participants. "Abused women and children feel empowered and confident when they train a dog and see it react appropriately," he says.

"This program also helps them communicate more openly. I've seen some of the older kids sit on the sidelines during the first week or two; they clearly don't want to be there, and they've shut off the world. By the fifth or sixth week, they're talking to the other kids and parents — it's just incredible. And it all starts by creating a bond with an animal."

Thanks to its success in Cincinnati, SHIP is being expanded throughout the U.S. by the YWCA, and is already in place in a San Francisco shelter.

## BUILDING THE HUMAN-ANIMAL BOND

The shelter also reaches out to older members of the community with its Companion Animal Access Program (CAAP). This 15-year-old program, operated by SPCA Cincinnati volunteers, helps volunteer pet owners and their well-behaved animals become certified so they can visit those who are not able to have, or have been away from, a pet of their own. The volunteers take their animals to hospitals, rehabilitation centers and nursing homes throughout Hamilton County, cheering patients and residents and providing a "paws-on" learning experience in the human-animal bond.

A pair of collaborations with the Hamilton County Parks District has brought benefits to SPCA Cincinnati, community members and animals alike. In the first, the shelter worked with the parks district to link a three-mile walking trail that connects the district's nearby soccer fields with the shelter, enabling shelter staff to exercise

animals and soccer fans to use the shelter's facilities during games.

A second joint effort will come to fruition in late 2010, when SPCA Cincinnati and the parks district complete the transformation of a 25-acre farm in the western part of the county into a large-animal rehabilitation facility and dog park.

SPCA Cincinnati's involvement with children in the community extends directly across the street to Stewart Elementary School, where a pilot program that lets children read to shelter dogs was introduced in 2003. Says Dates, "We bring the

kids over and have them read to the dogs in one of our get-acquainted rooms. It helps the kids relax to read in private to the animals, who are completely uncritical and don't point out their mistakes." Dates hopes the program will grow, both at the shelter and at the farm property when its renovation is complete. "We want to give kids who haven't been blessed with the opportunity to see large animals or life on a rural farm the chance to do both," he says. "We can also help them trace the long history of how animals, and especially beasts of burden such as horses and mules, have been used and protected over the years in the Cincinnati area."

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— Mike Retzlaff, SPCA Cincinnati



## A FACILITY OF THE FUTURE — TODAY

Reaching out to the community — and bringing people into the shelter — for educational purposes became much easier last year with the addition of a new 250-seat auditorium, complete with state-of-the-art video and sound systems. The Humane Center at the shelter's main facility provides an ideal venue for a variety of trainings, including classes for local vets, vet techs and animal control personnel, as well as presentations to youth groups and other organizations.

The high-tech auditorium is just one standout feature of SPCA Cincinnati's new 42,000-square-foot facility, half of which was a former church and school purchased in 2001. Recalls Dates of the ambitious renovation project, "We were lucky to find a facility that was conducive to remodeling. The school became our offices and clinic, the sanctuary our humane education center, and the gymnasium our dog kennel. Then we built an additional 22,000 square feet of kennels and cattery, the footprint of which can be duplicated to the north of the building if we ever need to expand or to consolidate our two facilities."



SPCA Cincinnati was careful to ensure the comfort of both animals and visitors by creating an inviting "green" shelter at the new facility. Wide aisles and high ceilings give the kennels and cattery a roomy feel that relaxes visitors, and skylights bathe both areas in natural light. Rather than chain-link gates reminiscent of prisons, each kennel features a tempered safety-glass door that provides a clear view of the animals inside. Fresh air abounds thanks to 26 air-handling systems throughout the facility, and the kennel and cattery floors are heated to 72 degrees — an amenity that allows the ambient room temperature to stay at 68 degrees, even during the coldest months.

Looking out for the best interests of its animal inhabitants and collaborating to bring the benefits of the human-animal bond to the community that surrounds it — that's what SPCA Cincinnati does best. ■

## GET MORE INFO

*To learn more about SPCA Cincinnati's SHIP program, email [mretzlaff@spcacincinnati.org](mailto:mretzlaff@spcacincinnati.org).*

