

League Links 2.0

A quarterly newsletter from the
League for Animal Welfare



Scotty got to pal around with a foster dog sister, sleep in bed with his foster mom, and play in the snow in his new parka!

She had a name: Winter Storm Fern. She came with ample warnings to states across the midwest - expect a foot of relentless snow that continues to fall for more than 24 hours.

But Fern didn't come with a playbook for what to do with shelter animals! With roads predicted to be unnavigable for 36-48 hours, and 130 dogs and cats relying on us for food; soft, clean beds; and love, League staff knew we couldn't take on Fern alone.

"We were hoping to get maybe 30 animals into foster homes," explained Executive Director Devon Smith. "We had a staff member spending the night Saturday night, and a couple of brave staff willing to drive in on Sunday. But a ratio of two staff members to 130 animals meant they would get the bare minimum of care for two, maybe even three days. Being a shelter pet is hard on the best of days; having that little attention for so many days was too heartbreaking to consider."

The call for help went out on social media and by email to all of our animal-loving friends on Thursday at 11:30am.

Within 3 hours, all the eligible dogs had found a foster. Within 6 hours, all the eligible cats were paired with foster families. Within 24 hours of our plea, 143 families had reached out to foster a pet for the storm - more families than we had pets in the shelter. "It was incredible," exclaimed Dog Care Coordinator Dawn Oberschlake. "103 cats and dogs went into foster in, like, 2 hours! It was a record!"

Our community set a record indeed - our "Snowmageddon" foster plea resulted in twice as many dogs and cats going into foster homes as any foster event in League history. Snowtastrophe averted.

"I couldn't see letting a dog go through the storm on a cold cement floor," explained first-time foster Paula Bobadilla, who fostered dog Dunn through the storm.

A Winter to Remember

A cold and snowy winter thaws in the warmth of compassion

Vaccinated and Loved

PARTNERSHIP WITH PETCO LOVE GETS 3,000 VACCINES INTO OUR COMMUNITY'S PETS

Each Friday, for two hours, our clinic lobby turns into a scene of loving chaos. The League hosts our low-cost, walk-in Wellness & Vaccine Clinic from 11am-1pm each week, for pet cats and dogs from families in any county and in any financial situation. There are no rules for who we serve – if you love your pet and want to give them a healthy life, you are welcome here.

When we say low cost, we mean it – the goal is to ensure preventative care that keeps pets safe can be accessed by anyone. There are no vet visit fees. Our a la carte services run from \$5-\$25. The average pet can get in and out with thorough care for about \$30.

VACCINATED AND LOVED

This is, in large part, thanks to the innovative work of Petco Love, the charitable arm of the Petco Corporation. Founded in 1999, Petco Love supports thousands of non-profit animal agencies. In 2021, they launched their “Vaccinated and Loved” campaign – an effort to get core vaccines (DaPP for dogs and HCP for cats) into every community pet. Each year, Petco Love distributes a million vaccines to 4,000 partner clinics around the country, with only one guideline: vaccinate your community’s pets for free.

When asked about their work, Petco Love President Chelsea Staley, shared: “Vaccinations are vital to protecting our beloved pets from life threatening but preventable diseases. Our goal is to make these critical vaccines accessible to as many pet parents as possible through our Vaccinated and Loved initiative, breaking down financial barriers and strengthening the human animal bond.”



THE VALUE OF LIFE-SAVING

These vaccines protect our pets against viruses that are highly contagious, and often life-threatening – Distemper and Parvovirus in dogs (as well as Adenovirus and Parainfluenza); Herpes, Calici, and Panleukopenia viruses in cats. Ensuring pets get these vaccines early in life (starting at 6 weeks old), and routinely update them, keeps pets healthy; and prevents the need for urgent (and expensive!) treatment if pets contract these illnesses.

But for many families, these lifesaving vaccines are financially out of reach. Consider American Animal Hospital Association’s recommendations for pet vaccines: 3 doses of the DaPP (for dogs) and HCP (for cats) vaccine, 2-4 weeks apart, when the pet is 6-16 weeks old; a 4th vaccine a year after that; and then vaccines every 1-3 years for the pet’s lifetime. A pet will get an average of 8-16 of these critical vaccines in their lifetime. Add in a veterinary visit fee, and, on the low-end, pet owners are looking at \$600-\$1200 for their pet to stay up-to-date on this vaccine alone. Petco Love, like the League, couldn’t envision a world in which lifesaving vaccines are so inaccessible to so many families. “Petco Love is on a mission to protect pets from deadly diseases.”



Our staff sees the impact of the Vaccinated and Loved campaign every week.

Veterinarian Erin Luker, who has worked the Wellness and Vaccine Clinic at the League, reflected on the families she has met. “People are showing us how much they love and value their pets, and how much they want to give them the best care, by showing up. None of this would be possible without Petco Love making critical, preventative care free.”

As Dr. Luker witnessed, Petco Love’s work has shown that removing the financial barrier was the only thing needed to open up the world of quality veterinary care for many pet families. Surveys collected from clinics taking part in their “Vaccinated and Loved” campaign show that only 37% of visiting pets had ever previously received a vaccine; and fewer than half of clients had ever visited a private veterinary office for any type of care. Pet parents wanted this care for their pets; they were looking for this care for their pets; they simply couldn’t afford this care for their pets.



“Your pet having their vaccines is always good; but sometimes, it means a LOT.”

FAMILY MATTERS

The impact of the Vaccinated and Loved campaign is deeply personal for many of our clients.

For dog owner Emily Stedman, the clinic allows her to ensure her dog, Bravo, will always be safe. Emily grew up with Maltese dogs and understands how expensive veterinary care can be. When she learned about our clinic, she immediately recognized how special it was. “This is the first dog I’ve adopted, and we are going to give him the very best life,” Emily says. “Part of that is bringing him here to make sure he is healthy and getting everything he needs.

Julie Lucero, agrees – and adds just how much a vaccine can mean for a family. “I took my dog, Pilar, to the League’s clinic last spring. Because of it, I was able to board my dog while I flew to Connecticut to be with my daughter, who was having surgery. Your pet having their vaccines is always good; but sometimes it means a *lot*.”

In 2025, the League’s clinic administered more than 3,000 DaPP and HCP vaccines, thanks to our partnership with Petco Love.

Every visit represents a family supported, a disease prevented, and a beloved pet able to stay safely at home. “Thanks to Petco Love,” shared Clinic Director Sarah Smith, “we’re protecting animals and preserving families, one vaccine at a time.” 🐾🐾



“A Winter to Remember” (Continued)

First-time League foster Becca Swift, who hosted cross-eyed kitty Amy, agreed: “I was looking for a way to make a positive impact during all the chaos and hardship going on in the world right now ... I thought about those sweet animals being alone for a whole weekend in the storm, I knew I had to give it a try.”

They did one better than just giving it a try: of the 103 cats and dogs who went into foster for the weekend, 32 were adopted by their foster family, or friends of their foster families. “Our little rescue dog that we’ve had for a year always sleeps in my daughter’s bed,” explained foster Matt Perron, who fostered (and adopted!) dog Vixen. “My son got to have the foster sleep in his bed this time, which made it difficult to say goodbye to her. So, we didn’t!”

When Cat Care Coordinator, Brookelynn Rowland found out that foster Candie Hill was adopting cat Theodasia, she cried. “Everyone kept overlooking her,” Rowland explained of her reaction, “but she is such a great cat! She spent 6 months in the shelter. It was unfair - I knew she would be a great family member.” And so



Foster kitty Tripp had a tiny human to love

“I was looking for a way to make a positive impact during all the chaos and hardship going on in the world right now.”

did foster, now permanent mom, Candie. “My absolute favorite part of fostering for the snowy weekend was realizing Theodasia was meant to be a fur-ever member of our family.”

“We call them foster wins,” laughed Dog Care Coordinator Oberschlake. “The goal isn’t *necessarily* for a foster to keep them forever, but we’re not upset if they do!”

But whether “temporary” fosters became permanent family members or not, the benefits of fostering are immeasurable for the dogs and cats, for the foster families, and for the League. The incredible community response meant that most League staff were able to stay off dangerous roads; and the staff who did make it to the shelter could ensure business went as usual for the 19 animals who couldn’t go into foster (some very shy dogs and cats for whom the change would have been stressful; and cats with ringworm). That included a very snowy play group for our shy huskies, who weren’t at all sad about the weather!

Most importantly, it meant a relaxing, stress-free weekend away from the bustle and strain of shelter life for the foster furballs: full of treats, snuggles, and warm blankets. Research shows that sustained time away from the shelter in a foster setting significantly reduces cortisol levels (the stress hormone) in dogs; and radically improves their chances for adoption. Being snuggled in the arms of humans in a soft, cozy bed in a quiet room is healing for homeless pets, who may spend months without that particular elixir.

And for some fosters, it meant filling a hole in their hearts. “I had been considering fostering since I lost my soul dog two years ago. I saw this as a sign from my Thor,” Amy Elekes said of her motivation to foster dog Shadow during the snowstorm. She wasn’t alone. “My wife and I began fostering after the sudden loss of our beloved cat, Sora,” shared foster Katrina Jones who had cat Biscuit for the storm. “Fostering became a way to extend the love we have for him out to another animal.”

Next time, Fern, we’ve got the playbook - a few extra loving arms at the ready. 🐾



The mushroom kittens! Four were adopted from foster.



Peter making the most of his good fortune!



A family looks awfully good on our sweet boy, Ditch.



Our shy huskies made the most of staying at the shelter!

Can't Stop, Won't Stop

AFTER ENDURING MONTHS OF LIFE-ALTERING ILLNESS, MOUSEY IS ON THE MEND

The first time Mousey almost died, in May of 2025, she was just 2 weeks old, living outside on a farm. The owner of the farm called in a panic: Mousey's eyes were glued shut and bulging with infection; and her mom was refusing to nurse her. She wouldn't survive without immediate intervention.

Newborn, still-nursing kittens with severe respiratory and eye infections? That's in the League's wheelhouse - we placed Mousey into one of our bottle-feeding foster homes the same day the panicked caretakers had called. If all had proceeded as normal, Mousey would have returned to the League in 6 weeks, ready to be put up for adoption.

But Mousey wasn't done trying to die.

At 6 weeks, Mousey was losing weight. She wasn't recovering from her respiratory infection; and she was increasingly lethargic. At 8 weeks, she was still too sick to be spayed. At 16 weeks, she was diagnosed with mycoplasma and pasteurella, bacteria we thought explained her chronic symptoms.

But at 18 weeks, Mousey started having seizures. Our medical team started simultaneously treating for toxoplasmosis, feline infectious peritonitis (FIP), and ideopathic epilepsy while we waited for tests to give us a direction.

At 6 months, in spite of every possible treatment, Mousey's seizures had gotten so severe, and the after-effects so long-lasting, her foster worried it was inhumane to continue to let her suffer. Her seizures seemed painful - Mousey would foam at the mouth, lose control of her bowels. She never seemed to come out of it - post-seizure, she was lethargic, spacey, confused. Our medical team had run every test, treated for every disease.

Until, lead League Veterinarian Lori Whitacre realized, there was one she hadn't run. "I think it's a liver shunt," Dr. Whitacre shared with Cat Care Coordinator Brookelynn Rowland. "But it's so rare



Major surgery for a liver shunt means the cone of shame!



Mousey, finally with relief from symptoms, in her foster home.

in cats ...". Rare enough that, in more than 30 years of practicing veterinary medicine, Dr. Whitacre had never diagnosed one.

A liver shunt is a congenital condition in which a misconnection in the veins allows blood to bypass the liver, the organ responsible for detoxifying and filtering blood. In-house blood tests could indicate whether we were on the right track; but a CT scan would have to confirm Whitacre's suspicion. It would cost more than \$2,000 just for the diagnosis; and \$5,000 more for the surgery to fix the condition.

"But it would be curative," explained League Executive Director Devon Smith. "Some cases are so difficult - do you pursue incredibly expensive vet care if there is a risk that it may not help? Every penny we spend may mean another cat or dog we can't take in and save 4 months down the road. But this one wasn't difficult - it would cost us \$7,000, which is surely not insignificant. But it would mean Mousey would, finally, lead a normal, long, happy life. She had been such a warrior, through so much illness - we owed her that chance."

Mousey had her surgery at the end of January - and she is thriving. "Despite the surgery, despite enduring months of seizures and constant medications, Mousey is sweet, loving, playful," said her foster, Julie Hermes. "Thanks to the League, Mousey is looking at a full and healthy life."

Mousey, her foster family, and the League share something in common: when faced with adversity, none of us stop until we overcome it!

Want to contribute to Mousey's life-saving care, so we never have to say no to the next one?

Donate at lfaw.org/donate

and note that it's for Mousey in the memo!



Mousey when she was found, sick and abandoned, on the farm.



Mousey with her foster sibling, before the diagnosis.



A Gift for the Ages

Charitable Naming Rights Available in Clinic Expansion

The League is excited to break ground this month on a 2,100 sq ft expansion of our clinic, adding new and improved space for our public veterinary services and our shelter cat program.

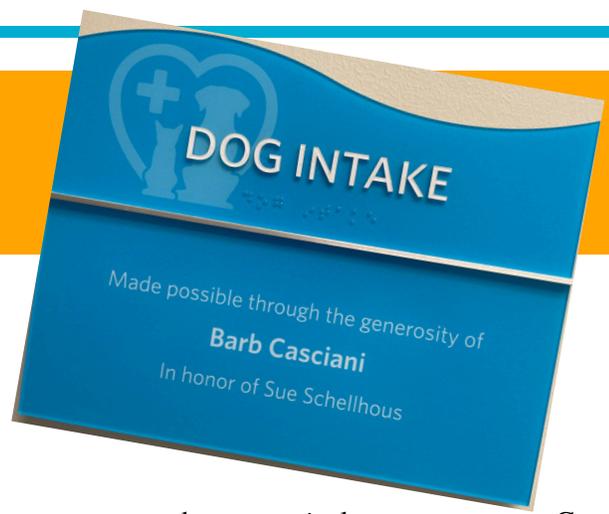
The expansion will allow the League to double the number of pets to whom we provide affordable spay/neuter and veterinary care; and improve the conditions for the more than 2,000 homeless cats we shelter each year.

With the expansion comes an opportunity for charitable gifts for the honorific naming of new spaces, rooms, and kennels. Charitable naming gifts are a wonderful opportunity to create a legacy for you and your family, or to honor a loved one or a soul pet - a public symbol of your dedication to ensuring the best, most loving care for companion animals no matter where they are in life.

Rooms in the new space available for charitable naming opportunities include isolation rooms for shelter cats battling illness; a veterinary surgical suite; a pharmacy; a treatment

space; an x-ray room; and post-surgical recovery rooms. Cat intake kennels and dog recovery kennels will also be added to the space and available for naming opportunities. Charitable naming gifts are recognized with plaques in the named space, and in all public correspondence about the clinic.

If you are interested in making a gift to last a lifetime, or need more information, please reach out to the League at devon@lfaw.org. 



GIVE A GIFT THAT LASTS FOREVER
For more information about a legacy gift with naming rights, email us at devon@lfaw.org.

ADOPT ME



Ditch - 3 years old, male

You can't miss Ditch - he'll be the cat with the pineapple collar on. Or an avocado collar. Or a toast collar. The indignities never miss poor Ditch! He was found in Goshen in June - a stray kitty, prone, in a ditch, too sick to even move. His amazing finder nursed him back to health, but couldn't keep him forever. Ditch has been hanging with us, sweet as can be, trying to find his new family. He wears the collars because allergies keep leading to ear infections, which keep leading to Ditch digging at his ears - so this boy will need a family that can keep him on a special diet. But most importantly, a family who will love him forever.



Rudi - 3.5 years old, male

Rudi's story is one that breaks us the most. In 2023, Rudi came to us from a partner shelter. He was exuberant - loved people, loved other dogs, loved cats. He got glowing reviews from fosters and volunteers. But then began a succession of adoptive homes that weren't right for him - and Rudi's light dimmed each time. With each return, we got back a dog who was more anxious than before. By his 5th adoption return in January, Rudi shut down completely - this once bright light now curls up in his kennel and trembles with stress and fear. Now, Rudi needs someone solid - someone he can count on. Rudi doesn't have a 6th return in him; he needs his forever someone.

View all the cats and dogs available for adoption at [LFAW.org/adoption-center](https://www.lfaw.org/adoption-center)