

# League Links 2.0

A quarterly newsletter from the  
League for Animal Welfare



*Hiro, an American  
Pit Bull Terrier,  
spent 99 days at the  
League before being  
adopted on May 25.*

Hiro is a charmer who gets along with everyone. Mable is a snuggler who adores children. Billy Bob is a shy guy who blossoms when he's with the people he knows. Pablo is a couch potato, while Surge is a ball of enthusiasm. Abby is as smart as they come. They are some of the most beloved dogs at the League for their charming, quirky personalities.

But collectively, those 6 dogs spent 1,742 days at the League. ***That's nearly 5 years.***

It's a growing issue in animal sheltering all across the US, laid especially bare in 2021: dogs - and more specifically, large dogs - are sitting in shelters far longer than they ever have before.

In 2019, according to a report from Pethealth, Inc, the average number of days that large dogs spent in a shelter before being adopted was 35 days. By 2021, that number had more than doubled, to an alarming 75 days. Bully breeds (e.g. "pit bull" dogs, like American Pit Bull Terriers and Staffordshire Terriers) get stuck in the system even longer - any dog identified as having any mix of bully breed in them took 30% longer to find a home than dogs of any other type.

## The Large Dog Crisis

*The Plight of Large Dogs in America's Sheltering System*

# ALL IN THE FAMILY

*Generations Join Together to Create a Legacy at the League*

For League volunteer Joan Long and her husband Dennis, family bonds have always been tight. The life-long animal lovers raised three sons—Noah, Jacob and Andrew—and enjoy four grandchildren, all of whom carry on the tradition of supporting rescue shelters through contributions and hands-on volunteering.

“Our family has always financially supported and volunteered at animal shelters,” Joan says. “Our entire family experiences a close connection to animals, especially dogs, and experience how they improve our lives and become members of households and families.”

So, in the face of tragedy—with the untimely passing of Andrew in 2008 and Noah in 2019—the family decided to turn adversity into opportunity and create a lasting legacy for their sons and grandchildren.



*Joan, husband Dennis, son Jacob, and grandkids Kennedy and Griffin pose with League dog Kesha on the agility equipment donated by the family.*

*"Joan has the most generous heart and is such a delight to spend time with."*

*Carrie Leary, Volunteer Coordinator*



*The Long's son Noah came by his love for animals naturally!*

“We donated supplies to the League in December of 2019 in honor of both Noah and Andrew,” Joan says. “That was the first Christmas and birthday since Noah’s death. Noah’s children connected immediately to the shelter, and their dad’s presence being at the shelter.”

In January of 2020, Joan began volunteering at the League and—in spite of pandemic restrictions—has continued to this day, walking the dogs and serving as a handler at adoption events. By April of 2020, her family adopted their first league dog, Beauregard, and she has since introduced her grandchildren to the fun and rewards of volunteering with dogs and cats at the League. Granddaughter Kennedy especially bonded with League dogs Abby and Downey; and loves taking the League cats for rides outside in a cat stroller! Volunteer Coordinator, Carrie Leary, says of Joan "She is always up to help in any way - she always wants to do what's best for the dogs and what's most helpful for staff."

“All of my grandchildren love cuddling with both cats and dogs, taking the dogs on walks and playing with them in the play yards,” Joan says. “The League provides the opportunity for children to start their volunteering experience early—to be able to play, cuddle, take cats on stroller rides and attend offsite events is wonderful. There are very few, if any, opportunities for multi-generations to volunteer together at animal shelters.”

This year, the family chose another gift for the League—this time, agility equipment for the dogs’ play yards. Joan and Dennis not only donated the equipment, they prepared the yards (no shortage of leaves were raked!) and assembled the equipment, along with their granddaughter, Joanna. On any given day, you’ll find pups playing on the ramps and testing their skill at corralling toys. The agility yard is a favorite for League dogs - they know making their way to the top of the agility ramp means yummy treats!



*Noah's daughter, Joanna, and Glamour enjoy the agility equipment Joanna helped put together with grandparents Joan and Dennis in honor of her dad.*

*"We decided to donate the play equipment to have a place to remember our sons, brothers, uncles, and dad that would make Noah and Andrew smile."*



*In addition to being an animal lover, son Andrew was a Musketeer, earning his BA and working on his MBA at Xavier.*

“Years ago, we saw how our dogs had enjoyed the equipment at Camp Bark in North Carolina,” Joan says. It’s so important for these animals to be socialized, and to stay physically and mentally active to increase their likelihood of adoption and finding a forever family, which is what our family hopes for every animal arriving at the League. So we decided to donate the play equipment from our family this past year for all of us to have a place to remember our sons, brothers, uncles and dad that would make Noah and Andrew smile.”

The League is so humbled to do this work in memory of Andrew and Noah; and so honored to work beside the entire family to celebrate this legacy of incredible love.



## The Large Dog Crisis: The Plight of Large Dogs in America's Sheltering System (continued)



Why does that matter? Because shelter life is hard on animals. In even the most well-resourced shelters, animals in a shelter's care are exposed to tremendous stressors like incessant noise; confined space; interrupted routines; a loss of control and predictability over their environment; and an inability to get sufficient sleep or relaxation time. And they are limited in their ability to engage in species-specific behaviors, like exploring new spaces and interacting with other animals.


As with people, the longer that an animal is exposed to stressors like the ones we see in sheltering, the more troubling the consequences can be for the animal. Studies show that long-term exposure to stressors and trauma in any species can lead to depression, anxiety, and personality disorders. Dogs are no different.

Dogs who live in shelters for long periods of time develop anxious tells, like repetitive pacing or spinning. Those behaviors often become so ingrained, the dog continues to practice them even after adoption. This troubling trend of large dogs spending more time in shelters, then, can have long-term ramifications for the dogs stuck in the system. For the number of days that large dogs live in this stressful environment to double in less than a year - that is nothing short of catastrophic for our dogs' mental health.

But there is hope. As Steve Zeidman, Senior VP of Pethealth, Inc points out, "if this was 10 years ago, this trend wouldn't have been there. We [the sheltering industry] would have just euthanized these animals. So the fact that shelters are working diligently to try to prevent euthanasia I think is amazing. But it does mean we have to address the animals that are languishing in our shelters."

So what can the League do for dogs like Surge, who entered her first shelter in September 2019?

A 2021 study, "Characteristics and Welfare of Long-Term Shelter Dogs" recommends providing long-term shelter dogs with "a predictable environment, a structured enrichment program, and undisturbed resting periods in order to manage arousal levels." The League is, more than ever, focused on providing consistent, structured, hearty enrichment programs for these dogs so that they can stay happy and healthy until their new families find them.

And the best part? You can help! Studies on dogs' cortisol levels show that just 15-minutes of a petting session with a human lowers their stress level significantly - and maybe, just maybe, yours too. 

### Volunteer with the Big Dogs

*Help keep our long-term dogs healthy and happy!*

- Take a long-term dog for a hike! Most of our long-termers are \*dreams\* on a leash and love seeing new scenery!
- Can you spare 15 minutes a week? Sign up to be a Dog Buddy! You will visit a long-term dog at the same time each week for just 15 minutes - help them establish a routine, and lower their cortisol levels!
- If time is in short supply, sponsor a long term dog! Sponsorships are as little as \$25/month (funds Kong toys, puzzle feeders, and toys) or as much as \$100/month (funds off-site adventures), and help give our furballs some epic enrichment fun!

Email us at [info@lfaw.org](mailto:info@lfaw.org) for more ideas!

# The Highland 15

**SAVING THE MOST VULNERABLE CATS - 15 AT A TIME!**



When Stephanie, our Cat Care Coordinator, fielded a call from the Highland County Humane Society, the question wasn't would we help with a hoarding situation of 40+ cats, but how many could we help. She quickly counted available spots (getting a little creative about what counts as "available" and a "spot!"), and offered to take in 15 cats, sight and history unseen.

Little did we know how critical that help would be.

When the Highland 15 came our way, their medical needs were more extensive than we could have imagined.

Ten of the fifteen cats tested positive for feline leukemia. All 15 of the cats needed extensive dental surgeries, to the tune of \$10,000 - gulp!

*The League is one of only two Cincinnati shelters with an active adoption program for feline leukemia cats.*

And while we may have taken a minute for a collective deep sigh, the next reaction was the most important: thank goodness we could make space for these sweet babies. Because the League is one of only two shelters in our area that has an active program to adopt out cats with feline leukemia.

And over the last few weeks, we quickly realized the emphasis shouldn't be on the medical issues, but on the "sweet babies" part - these kitties, in spite of a difficult history, are some of the friendliest and spunkiest bunch we have ever had the good fortune to shelter.

Housed in Room 12 at the League, most of the Highland crew is orange. And all of the Highland crew wants your attention, like, yesterday! If you venture into the Highland room (and if you can get in before several of them escape past your unsuspecting legs), a swarm of orange tabbies will noisily insist you sit down and offer a lap - upon which four or five of them will plunk their furry little bodies, and stay there until you submit to sufficient petting (there's no telling how long is "sufficient," so allow yourself some extra time in your schedule!).



The US sheltering system is always overwhelmed with cats - so cats with such extensive (and expensive) medical conditions like this crew are, unfortunately in most shelters, euthanized due to a lack of resources. We can't imagine that fate for these wonderful cats, who want nothing more than to snuggle with a new family. Medical bills we can work out; not giving these incredible cats the chance for a better tomorrow would have been the far bigger travesty. Here's to a world where all shelters have the resources to give every sweet orange snuggle-bug a second chance.

# Always Learning

## LEAGUE STAFF TAKE A TIME-OUT FOR TRAINING!

Animal sheltering is a highly-skilled industry. To do the job well, and to keep the animals happy, healthy, and safe, staff need an incredible breadth of knowledge on animal behavior, animal handling, animal safety, and animal medical conditions, among other skillsets.

But sheltering, as with most animal-related fields, often operates on a "learn-as-you-go" model. Limited budgets mean training is wont to fall by the wayside - and staff are left to figure things out on their own. As you might imagine, staff turnover tends to be high in an industry like that!

The League has set out to change that model, and set training minimums that focus on animal sheltering basics: sheltering trends; basic veterinary knowledge to identify medical conditions; and safe handling and training techniques to keep animals enriched and the people who handle them safe!



Our entire staff went through a rigorous 2-day training course on May 11-12 to kick off that process, learning everything from how to identify ringworm, to how to teach a dog to "leave it" (a useful command for both a run-in with delicious goose poop, to recalling a dog who is reactive to other dogs - from the ridiculous to the sublime!).

We're always proud of our staff - but this month, we're a little prouder of their incredible commitment to their field! 🐾🐾

### ADOPT ME



#### **Betty Boop - 6 years old, female**

Boop was adopted from the League as a kitten in 2016, but returned last fall when her person lost their home. Having known only one family in that time, Boop has been understandably stressed in the shelter - and that means she can act a little shy when potential adopters come to meet her. Boop needs a family that can see past that demure first impression, and give her the time and space to blossom with your family. The family who does will earn the love of a sweet, funny, quirky, playful little sweetheart.



#### **Pablo - 5 years old, male**

Pablo is part of our None Left Behind program. He has a medical condition, Subarachnoid Diverticulum, that causes fluid buildup to slightly compress his spinal cord. The condition is easy to manage - a daily dose of a steroid that alleviates his mild symptoms - and is covered by the League for Pablo's lifetime! But the hot dogs he will demand that you encase his pill in? You and Pablo can negotiate those separately! But we know with a loving family, the rest will work itself out.

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