

A community treasure

Hinsdale Humane Society celebrates 60th birthday

BY MIKE ELLIS

Many organizations grow from humble beginnings, beyond what their founders could have envisioned. Out of care and concern for homeless animals in the community, six local women, only four of whom are known—Marjorie Lessel, Patricia Cushing, Jane Sharts and Helen Weddell—started the Hinsdale Humane Society in 1953 in lieu of a rabies outbreak that befell the Hinsdale area.

“At the time, dogs were kind of considered nuisances,” Hinsdale Humane Society Executive Director Lori Halligan said. “They weren’t living in people’s homes—they were in doghouses and living outdoors; they’d run across the street and across town.

“These local women were concerned that [these conditions weren’t] safe for the community, because of the rabies outbreak; so, they took it upon themselves to start Hinsdale Humane Society.”

Six decades later, the humane society has fortified itself within the community, adopting out 800 animals on an annual basis. HHS has always resided just east of the police and fire departments, around the Symonds Drive curve on Elm Street,



Executive Director Lori Halligan and Operations Manager Jennifer Vlazny care for Aurora at the Hinsdale Humane Society.

Photos by Marcello Rodarte

but it has undergone a number of physical changes through the years. In 1959, the current building was constructed for \$25,000, and it has been added onto several times since.

The society’s primary function is to educate people about the importance

of caring for animals properly and compassionately, so that they are not maltreated or neglected. HHS is also an adoption agency for dogs, cats and, intermittently, other stray animals, such as birds, hedgehogs, guinea pigs and rabbits. In the past, the majority of the society’s

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Hinsdale Humane Society Through the Years



Early Education Efforts

As part of Humane Education, *The Perils of Pal* was developed in 1956. The brochure was in such demand that the ladies shared it with other humane groups.

1956

Pet Therapy begins

Attempting to reach out to the community, HHS began its Pet Therapy Program. The program began with “Pet-a-Pet,” which took therapy dogs into nursing homes.

1982

Still going strong

After six decades in the community, HHS continues to thrive. The society adopted out more than 800 animals in 2012.

2013

1953

HHS is founded

Six Hinsdale women began HHS as a non-profit organization with three initial goals: 1) to educate the public in the proper training and handling of animals; 2) to arrange for the humane disposal of unclaimed animals; and 3) to provide a safe, sanitary pound to replace unsatisfactory facilities.

1959

First Building

At a cost of \$25,000, the building on its present site was dedicated on Sept. 17, 1959. It became the first humane society in DuPage County.



1994

Continuing Growth

The shelter received an update in 1994, thanks to a significant bequest from the estate of Charles Hillinger.



Timeline information courtesy of Christie Cuthbert

550 Rooms. 25,000 sq. ft. of meeting space. I-55 at County Line Rd. 1 1/2 mile south of I-294.



630-325-2900

630-323-6630

630-323-7530

630-986-4100

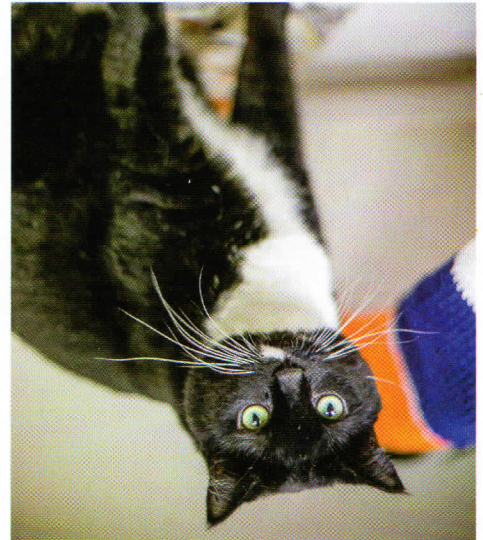
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Friends or Relatives Visiting Soon? That's Okay, We'll Take Them.

animals originated locally, but perhaps due in part to increased education locally, operations manager Jennifer Vlazny said they now come primarily from downstate shelters. "It used to be that the majority of our animals were owner surrenders, where people were relinquishing their pets," said Vlazny, who has worked at HHS for 28 years. "We're seeing less of that in this area, fortunately, but there's still a need for shelters for homeless animals." Prospective pet owners and curious onlookers are free to visit HHS without



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Volunteer Tradition
The society's over 300 volunteers are its lifeblood, without which HHS PR Special Events Director Christie Cuthbert said it could not operate at the level it does. "[Our volunteers] help keep this place running on a daily basis," Cuthbert said. "We have a lot of support from the community; every other day there's a lemonade stand raising money for us, or a Girl Scout troop that made blankets for the cats."

Once you are considering adopting a pet, previously scheduling an appointment. Vlazny said the humane society becomes active in trying to match owner with animal. "When they come into the shelter, we let them walk through our kettles or cat area to see if anything catches their eye," she said. "What we do is try to figure out why they're interested in a particular animal, or what their needs are. "We try to help make the right placement based on what they're looking for. We'll counsel them as far as what the animal's qualities are, its personality, its behavior. If it looks like a match, they're able to take the animal out for a walk, or interact with it in the room." All animals must be spayed or neutered before they are adopted.

Birthday Bash

HHS will celebrate its 60th anniversary with an outdoor "birthday bash" on Aug. 24. While watching a photo display chronicling the society's history, visitors will be treated to hot dogs, cupcakes and could drinks. For children, there will be a balloon artist present. The celebration will also include a "doggie cupcake-eating contest," so guests are encouraged to bring their pets,—provided they are well-behaved and on a leash. "I think it's a great opportunity to see your neighbors and their pets," HHS intern Sarah McJohn said. "A lot of the animals around here are from the humane society, or people know someone who has a dog from the humane society, so it's a great time to come out and celebrate an institution that's been part of the community for 60 years."

The HHS Birthday Bash will be held between Noon and 2 p.m. outside the shelter at 22 N. Elm Street in Hinsdale. On Oct. 26, the society will hold "A Fetching Affair," a black-tie gala, at Butterfield Country Club. For more information about HHS, visit www.hinsdalehumane.org.