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TAPS celebrates anniversary

By Amanda Jacobs

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[Print Page](#)

PEKIN - Benefits to volunteering at the Tazewell Animal Protective Society are many, said Executive Director Angela Blackman.

"It's a lot of fun," she said. "You meet a lot of new people, you're making a difference in the lives of the animals, and ultimately that means making a difference in people's lives, too."

TAPS hosted an open house on Saturday to thank its volunteers and celebrate its 50th anniversary.

The event featured tours of the shelter, refreshments and raffles. Although some outdoor activities were curtailed by the cold weather, Blackman said, a bonfire was still scheduled for later in the evening.

Representatives from Illinois Vest-a-Dog were at the shelter on Saturday to present a bullet- and stab-proof vest to Maddux, a 17-month-old Belgian Malinois who works with Illinois State Trooper Anthony Slaughter.

The nonprofit organization has provided vests for 304 police dogs, said volunteer Vicki Harrington, and Maddux's vest was donated by actress Doris Day.

Maddux wasn't the only animal getting attention on Saturday, however. Blackman said a few animals were adopted during the afternoon, and many visitors interacted with the shelter's dogs and cats.

Brian and Cory Lucas of Pekin and their 8-year-old son, Dylan, came to look at the cats that were available for adoption. The family has two cats already, Dylan said, but one belongs to his mom and the other belongs to his dad. "And I have to clean out the cat boxes," Dylan said.

Cory said the family also was looking into the possibility of volunteering at the shelter.

"We're animal lovers in general," she said.

"I would save every single stray if I had to," Dylan said.

Mackinaw resident Sharon Stafford took her sons, Eric, 4, and Aaron, 5, to look at the cats. She also picked up a volunteer application.

Twelve-year-old Kirsten Wenger and her mother, Tina, came to look at the shelter's animals about four and a half years ago, and they've been volunteering there ever since.

"It's just gratifying to give them attention and teach them some obedience," Tina said,

“and hopefully get them to where they can be adopted.”

Volunteer Pamela Scott said the TAPS staff works hard to match the right pets to the right homes.

“I don't think you can deal with any better people,” she said.

Scott first came to the shelter last July to donate dog food after her dog died. About a week later, she adopted Dalton, a 2-year-old hound, and she later adopted Dana, a 3-year-old German shepherd mix. Scott started volunteering by cleaning cages, she said, and she eventually became more and more involved, working at off-site events, taking pictures of the dogs for Petfinder.com, and working on the shelter's electronic newsletter.

“I'm about here every day,” she said.

Joanne Fleming began volunteering with TAPS for “therapy” after she lost a pet in 1995. She does “a little bit of everything” with the shelter,” she said, and she has provided a foster home for more than 100 cats.

“You feel like you make a difference,” she said, “no matter when it is, what the situation is. It just really makes you feel warm inside.”

Blackman said TAPS has a great group of volunteers, but it could always use more. There are a number of ways for volunteers to get involved at the shelter, both on- and off-site, she said.

The shelter hosts an orientation for new volunteers at 6:30 p.m. on the second and fourth Wednesday of every month, Blackman said. Potential volunteers can visit <http://www.tapsshelter.org> for more information.

“There are plenty of opportunities for whatever your interests and talents are,” Scott said.

Kirsten and Tina encouraged others to volunteer.

“Do it for the animals,” Kirsten said.

“It's a lot of fun,” Tina said. “As long as they're animal lovers, they'll love being here.”