

TAPS is tapped out for space



By None

Josh Bradshaw / Times staff Jake Lipe and Alyssa Menne of Bartonville play with their labradoodle Coco and their newly adopted pitbull mix Gia at Tazewell Animal Protective Society in Pekin Friday.

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By Tara Mattimoe
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PEKIN, Ill. -

With the holiday season in full swing, Pekin's no-kill animal shelter TAPS, is full to the brim with cats and dogs needing to be adopted, said office manager Beth Locascio. And with many families hit hard by the downturn in the economy, it is unlikely they will unload them any time soon.

"We're having a lot of calls coming in from families here in Pekin who are just struggling right now — people losing their homes, being laid off. Just a lot of sad stories," Locascio said.

Unfortunately, hard times for pet owners do not often bode well for their furry companions, and many have ended up at the doors of TAPS, said Locascio. Because they are currently full to capacity, however, those hoping to relinquish their pets to TAPS for adoption are being put on a waiting list.

The waiting list is broken into three separate categories, Locascio said. Owners of small dogs and puppies (under 25 pounds) on the list are waiting one to two weeks to reach the top of the list, she said, while large dog owners are waiting about 60 days. Cat owners have the longest wait, 160 to 180 days.

Asked why the number of cats at the shelter is so high, TAPS board member and past board president Henry Cakora said that it seems more than usual were born and abandoned earlier this year.

"We were finding a lot out in the streets, kittens in the trash," Cakora said.

For those who are desperate and can't wait so long to get off the waiting list, TAPS is referring them to other no-kill shelters in the area like Peoria's Foster Pet Outreach Animal Shelter, Lacon's The Ark Animal Shelter, and Springfield's Waggin' Tails Animal Shelter, Locascio said.

Locascio said that although she isn't sure how it will go this year with the poor economy, adoption rates usually do increase over the holidays as people decide to add a pet to their homes. Anyone wanting to give a TAPS animal as a gift, however, will need to bring their intended recipient in to the shelter first, because TAPS does not adopt animals out until the potential owner has met the dog or cat.

Locascio said that oftentimes, the shelter gets an influx of animals a month or so after Christmas due to those who received a pet as an unwanted gift or thought a new pet was a good idea at the time and decided later that it was not.

Although the number of people hoping to unload their pets in today's poor economy is rising, donations are not, Cakora said.

"I'd say donations are down, but nothing catastrophic," he said.

Cakora said that about half of TAPS' income comes from donations, and the amount they receive is highly variable from year to year. Other means of raising money for the shelter include fundraisers like Tailwaggers Classic, the little red dog house donation boxes scattered throughout town, and various other events.

Cakora, who has been involved with TAPS for about five years, said it has improved leaps and bounds since its early days.

"There's been a 1,000 percent change in our stature in the county and the community," Cakora said. The two veterinary technicians recently added on staff, as well as a larger and improved waiting room and "great volunteers" has made a world of difference, Cakora said.

Locascio said that this year's TAPS Christmas trees at Schnucks Supermarket and the Tractor Supply Store will help raise money for the shelter over the holidays, and TAPS will also hold off-site adoption events on Dec. 5 and 6 at PetCo Animal Supplies in Peoria and on Dec. 12 and 13 at PetsMart in East Peoria.

"Usually during the holiday season, the community is very generous with us," Locascio said.

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