

On the Positive Side: New horizons in HSSNM humane education programs

by Jean Gilbert /for the Sun-News

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It could be a banner year in humane education for the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico (HSSNM). The year is off and running with multi-age adult groups as new participants to the "Critter Connection" program that include Tresco consumers and Montana Meadows residents. While youth participation is typical for the "Critter Connection" and "Diggity Dog Learning" programs brought to area schools and clubs on a weekly or monthly basis by HSSNM, adult participation in this arena is certainly something new.

The invitation to bring the CC program to these adult groups is exciting for HSSNM and an appropriate request by program directors, with the interests of their consumers and residents at heart for their love of animals. While plans are being mapped out and arranged for monthly or twice-monthly sessions, we've had a good sampling with two CC presentations for Tresco consumers during the past month.

The first presentation was held at the Tresco headquarters meeting room, where we were warmly received by 30-35 attendees including consumers and staff. Attendees were thrilled to meet ambassador dog "Shira," a rescued beagle. She was accompanied by her owner Rose Street, a HSSNM volunteer-educator, who gave an animated presentation on pet care and owner responsibility. Shira impressed the audience with her citizenship skills and training, with prompt "sits" and "stays" on command and with lots of lovin' and kisses for everyone!

The second session was held at the city dog park with Susan Sammis, TheraPaws volunteer-educator, demonstrating agility training to Tresco consumers and staff with her two highly trained Welsh Corgis, "Isis" and "Nessa." With the use of a special tunnel and jump bars for the agility course, the dogs demonstrated ability to follow multiple commands. The audience was amazed and delighted in seeing them perform. Although years of training were involved, the dogs' pleasure in running the course made it seem magical. The excursion to the park was a memorable occasion in many respects, with community integration and interaction with members of the public and their dogs.

Future CC sessions include service learning opportunities where interested Tresco consumers and Montana Meadows residents can opt to assist "Cans 4 Critters," an on-going HSSNM project, involving litter clean-up with retrieval and reclamation of aluminum cans to benefit animals in need.

The C4C project, over the course of a year and a half, has raised more than \$1,500 to help numerous animals with medical needs, including aid with surgery costs for an injured dog for removal of a bullet caused by a drive-by shooting and treatment for removal of a tumor for another dog.

Future planning of CC activities with Tresco consumers and Montana Meadows residents provide HSSNM with opportunities for collaboration with animal welfare organizations in the community, as well as private individuals and pet owners. Consider volunteering with this program. The expertise and ideas you bring provide enrichment and foster a humane ethic with kindness towards animals as the primary emphasis.

Jean Gilbert, humane educator and board member of HSSNM, established the Critter Connection program five years ago with the Boys & Girls Club. She volunteers with educators in schools and youth organizations, providing critter clubs on a weekly basis. For more information about the CC program, check online at www.hssnm.org or call 522-2529. Guest authors can call HSSNM at 575-523-8020.