

On the Positive Side: Animal education program teaches compassion

by Jean Gilbert

Sept. 16, 2016

Editor's note: Today's article is provided by Jean Gilbert, the Education Team coordinator for the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico and secretary of the Coalition for Pets and People, working to instill positive outcomes for children and animals in Doña Ana County. Gilbert is a retired educator.

LAS CRUCES - I always feel a tug at the heartstrings reading the precious notes from school children for sessions we've held in classrooms. I'm struck by the thoughtful letters, the concentration and skill of youngsters to create artful designs and write endearing messages: "Thak you for teachen us to lern ubot pets" and "Thank you four cuming and four the do'gs!" The letters are treasures, delightful to re-read and share with colleagues.

Fur'ever Friends started several years ago, but the name is relatively new, adopted from B.F.F. Books for Furever Friends launched by the founder who generously donated a sizeable number of books for the initial project start last year.

Fur'ever Friends sessions with stories and activities relate to animal welfare topics and take place on a regular basis in several area classrooms while Books for Furever Friends is available on request with presentations to classes in area school districts and books are donated to teachers. In addition "Critter Connection" is a longstanding monthly program at a couple locations, and is available on request to schools and clubs with ambassador dogs demonstrating agility and training skills at the direction of their owners who double as effective humane educators.

The objective of the Humane Society's education program is instilling the 3R's — reverence, respect, and responsibility — by cultivating empathy for animals through ambassadors, stories, activities, and projects that build good citizenship and moral character and empower youth to make a difference.

The program involves hands-on experiences, is tailored for age and developmental level, ties with school curriculum and includes art and music.

The program is also collaborative for service learning opportunities available to students and groups such as litter cleanup at area parks or community sites with aluminum cans retrieved for the Humane Society's "Cans 4 Critters" project, helping pets in need with "chipins" from the proceeds of reclaimed aluminum.

Books for Furever Friends has donated over 200 books to classroom teachers through presentations by the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico on pet owner responsibility, canine-feline behavior and care, lost-found pets, safety around animals, spay-neuter awareness, stories/books on the environment and nature, and a biography of Albert Schweitzer appropriate for older students. Titles include captivating stories and award-winning books such as "Are You Ready For Me?," "Buddy Unchained," "Before You Were Mine," "It's Raining Cats," "Mrs. Crump's Cat," "Pablo's Puppy," "Kamie Cat's Terrible Night," and "Stray Dog."

Volunteers are welcome and donations to purchase books are needed. Please contact me at 575-640-6867 or jean@hssnm.org and visit us at www.hssnm.org.

You are invited to HSSNM's annual Members and Friends Meeting at 2 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 17, in the Great Room of the Unitarian Universalist Church, 2000 S. Solano.

The program, with refreshments and music, will feature guest speaker Kurt Fenstermacher, director of El Paso Animal Services, discussing his city's shelter reforms, how they apply to our work here and the no-kill goal for our communities.