

## **On the Positive Side**

### **Las Cruces teen becomes advocate for animals**

**By Jeff Barnet / My Las Cruces reporter**

**Posted: 09/10/2010 01:00:00 AM MDT**

Las Cruces— We hear about disturbing things on the television every day. We might shake our heads in dismay, but most of us will go on with our day and our lives without missing a beat.

However, for one Las Cruces teen, what she saw got her to take action and months later she remains committed to the cause.

Lauren Harkins, 13, saw a television show that documented the tragedies of animal abuse and the high rate of animal euthanization across the country. She saw the video when she was living near White Sands Missile Range. When her family recently moved to the northeast side of Las Cruces, she immediately signed up to become a volunteer at the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley at 3551 Bataan Memorial West. She'll be an 8th grader this year.

"People abuse animals because they won't fight back," Lauren said. "Animals can't talk, they can't say, 'Don't do that to me, I have feelings.' I want to help animals have a voice."

Because she is only 13, Lauren must be accompanied by her father, Chuck Harkins, 46, when she volunteers at the center, which is usually once or twice a week, she said.

At the center, she walks and exercises the animals, both cats and dogs, and plays with them.

She and her father also help with off-site adoptions around town. There is always an Animal Services Center staff member with them, she said, but she enjoys learning about the adoption process up close. At the most recent off-site event, six dogs and two cats were adopted.

Lauren likes the center's 30-day foster adoption policy, which gives potential new pet owners 30 days to try out a new cat or dog at home before making a final commitment.

"A lot of people think because the dog is quiet or docile in the cage, that's what his personality is like," she said. "But when a dog is being what a dog should be, that dog is going to get wound up. Dogs can get rowdy."

The best part of the work, she said, is seeing a cat or dog in the arms of an excited child "who can't wait to take the animal home and play with it."

"When you find the right dog, you are going to have a wonderful time," she said.

While it saddens her to see people bringing dogs back to the shelter, she said she has learned a hard lesson that not all animals can find the right home.

"We would not be having the big problem that we have with euthanizing so many dogs and cats if people would spay and neuter their pets," she said.

Lauren's father was a veterinarian technician as he was in high school. Lauren said she might also like to be a vet tech or possibly an animal control officer.

"Why not be a veterinarian?" her father asked. "They make \$75 just to answer a question."

Although Lauren has had experiencing dressing quail, she said she is not sure about performing surgery on live animals.

"I don't know about that," Lauren said. "What if you cut the wrong thing?"

In the meantime, her father, a huge Star Trek fan, is glad to support Lauren in her new venture.

"It's better than playing video games," he said.

"It's really fun," she said. "Instead of turning into a vegetable in front of the TV, you can go to the shelter and change some lives."

My Las Cruces reporter Jeff Barnet's four-year-old South Pole sleddog, Sophie, was a shelter dog. Barnet can be reached at [jbarnet@lcsun-news.com](mailto:jbarnet@lcsun-news.com); (575) 541-5476.