



People Power
BY CARRIE ALLAN

Kevin Simpson

Position: Director of Animal Behavior and Training (the first ever) at the Washington Humane Society in Washington, D.C.

Community size: About 550,000 residents live in Washington; surrounding suburbs in Maryland and Virginia add a zero to that figure.

How he got here: Simpson trained dogs as a hobby in high school and college but never thought of it as a potential career. He ended up in human resource management but wasn't satisfied. After volunteering at Mercer County Humane Society in West Virginia, he worked for a pet resort in the Pittsburgh area that helped train and socialize dogs at local shelters. It was there that he decided to make shelter work a career and started sending out resumes. An APDT-certified trainer, he became Washington Humane's animal care manager close to three years ago. The shelter created his new position as part of its five-year "Good Home Guarantee" plan, through which the organization's leaders hope to reach a 100-percent placement rate for adoptable animals by 2010.

His babies: Many of the dogs coming into the humane society are nervous about people and not particularly responsive

to potential adopters. Under a program Simpson initiated, staff feed dogs by hand—a process that's helped many of the pooches open up and become more responsive to visitors.

His invention: He also developed Crazy Tubes. (*Crazy whaa ...?*) Crazy Tubes are lengths of clear rubber piping attached to the front of dog runs. The top of the pipe is outside of the kennel; the bottom opening is inside. (*But why?*) WHS doesn't have enough space to isolate all incoming dogs, Simpson explains, and some are nervous and "may be a little schnarky at first. We want to give them a few days to chill out before we evaluate them. But in the meantime, adopters come in and see them and want to interact with them, and they could get bitten." With Crazy Tubes, adopters can feed a dog a piece of kibble through the winding tube without ever risking a finger. Dogs love it, kids love it, and it seems to take the tension—and the potential for nips—out of the meet-and-greet.

Surprise, surprise: Simpson's seen the world of difference among community animal shelters firsthand. At the shelter where he volunteered in West Virginia, he mostly worked with typical pet dogs with few aggression issues—"your usual family dogs," he says. Coming to an inner city shelter was an eye-opener. WHS is inundated not just with pit bulls and dogs with

behavior issues but with many other members of the animal kingdom: guinea pigs, crocodiles, Amazon parrots. "Just recently I was holding a stray rooster while they cleaned its cage," Simpson says.

His frustrations: He wants his plans to move faster. "I have a vision of 20 volunteers being here every day, all ready to train the dogs," he says, noting that Nicole Brown, WHS's new shelter manager, has been a huge help in getting his ideas for staff training implemented. "But I'm just impatient. Good things are happening. Besides, once we have those 20 volunteers, I'll want something new."

