

SHOW ME THE
MONEY
BY KATINA ANTONIADES

Piggie Primping and Bunny Beautification

Shelter offers “spa day” for animals to raise money and awareness



(Left) For the bargain price of \$18, local bunnies, guinea pigs, and cats can get groomed and have their nails done. (Right) Bunnies pose for their “glamour shots” at the Red Door Animal Shelter. TONI V. GREETIS

When Chicagoans look up “Red Door” in the Yellow Pages, they’ll find a few entries, including the Red Door Animal Shelter in Rogers Park and an Elizabeth Arden Red Door Spa on Michigan Avenue. The similar names are unlikely to cause confusion: If you want to adopt a cat, call the shelter. If you need a manicure, call the spa—that is, unless the manicure is for your rabbit.

For more than two years, the Red Door Animal Shelter has offered “spa” services for rabbits, guinea pigs, and cats during “Spa-Di-Da Day.” At the quarterly events, volunteers and board members make over and massage animals at rates ranging from \$7 for basic grooming to \$18 for grooming with nail trimming. A photographer who serves on the shelter’s board takes “glamour shots” for \$28; \$1 raffle tickets and a Red Door cookbook also bring in revenue. Attendees of the October event can order holiday cards featuring their pets.

July’s spa day brought in more than \$2,200. Pet owners often add an extra donation to the fees or buy a raffle ticket. “We try to price things so that that extra dollar or two comes easily—for example, \$18 for [a grooming] package,” says Emilie Johnson, vice president of the board of directors. “Most people say, ‘Here’s \$20—give me two raffle tickets then, to make it easier.’”

The popular spa days create “utter chaos,” says Johnson, but volunteers and board members keep things under control during the four-hour events. They greet and direct people, collect payments, provide information, and of course, serve as bunny (and guinea pig and cat) beauticians. Making sure enough helpers and supplies are on hand is crucial, says Johnson, adding that “organization is key.”

Event volunteers try to make the 20-minute wait go quickly, keeping anxious stage moms and dads abreast of timing and offering refreshments and tours.

Johnson credits Spa-Di-Da Day’s growth to word-of-mouth—and to rabbit lovers.

At least three-quarters of the furry clients are rabbits and guinea pigs. “If [people are] into rabbits and they have a rabbit—anything that has to do with rabbits, they’ll show up; they’ll support it,” she says.

After seeing event flyers in the window, curious neighbors also stop by with their animals, giving volunteers the chance to explain other shelter offerings, says Johnson. “They’re sort of a captive audience ... because we have their pet in another room,” she says.

Red Door also promotes the event through its blog, local news stations, and radio PSAs. Seasonal advertisements tailor the message: “It’s time to spruce up for spring,” for example.

Red Door prides itself on its local reputation as a resource for rabbit owners, and Spa-Di-Da Day provides a great opportunity to share tips about rabbit care, especially with first-time rabbit owners. And once they’ve been massaged, groomed, trimmed, admired, and photographed, the rabbits learn something too: that they’re lucky bunnies. **AS**