

Don't Forget About Us

Shelter staffs use special events, savvy marketing, and social networking to promote small-animal adoption

BY JIM BAKER

Animal shelters house a lot more than cats and dogs—you'll often find cages and aquariums filled with rabbits, guinea pigs, mice, rats, hamsters, a variety of birds, turtles, reptiles, and other critters.

But most people don't realize shelters have such a menagerie.

At the Dumb Friends League in Denver, small companion animals like hamsters and guinea pigs are displayed prominently at the front of the adoption area—and they regularly surprise visitors, says Theresa Geary, vice president of operations. "You'll hear people say, 'I had no idea that you would have these animals.' We're definitely seeing an awareness growing over the years, but for some people, it's not the first thing they think."

It often takes extra effort and a little creativity to raise the profile of small animals—and various shelters and rescue groups tackle the problem with a mixture of education, special events, and savvy marketing.

body gets a name, everybody gets a profile, everybody gets up on our website."

Gollin and Carrie Harrington, the shelter's communications manager, take every opportunity to promote their small animals. "We have regular television spots on our local ABC affiliate, and Comcast does adoption spots in its On Demand. We were one of the first shelters in our area to start bringing small companion animals on TV," Harrington says.

And it's not just little rodents that enjoy their air time: Following the seizure of chickens from a factory farm, the shelter found itself housing about 100 of the birds, so Gollin and Harrington took one of them to do an adoption promo. "The studio's about a half-hour drive from here, and on the way, she laid an egg. I brought it on TV for the interviewer," Harrington says.

Special themed events are a good way to get the word out, too. Just ask Marcy Schaaf, founder and executive director of SaveABunny, a rescue group based in Mill Valley, Calif. "We have a woman who adopted from us who has

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marketing, advertising, and run the shelter's website. She tries to use all avenues to get the public used to seeing the shelter's small companion animals; whenever dogs and cats appear in various materials, small animals are included, too. "On our website, in our brochures, our fliers, our requests for donations—whatever it is, we put them in," she says.

These days, many shelters are using not only their websites, but social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to promote the little guys. Gollin and Carrington have done short, informational videos about the proper care

of birds and rabbits, and more are planned on hamsters, guinea pigs, and rats. The videos are attracting a lot of hits on YouTube, according to Carrington.

"Those videos are real important," Gollin says, "and I know we've gotten several adoptions from them. People have said, 'Oh, I saw the videos, and it got me thinking, and I did some research, and now I realize that this is a great pet for me.'" **AS**

MUTTS by Patrick McDonnell



FROM PATRICK MCDONNELL'S BOOK, *SHELTER STORIES*

Suzanne Gollin tries to remind people—including shelter staff—that, just like their canine and feline counterparts, small animals are individuals. Each has a unique personality. "I wanted the small animals to be evaluated and promoted the same as our dogs and cats, and I've worked really hard on getting everybody behind that," says Gollin, small companion animal evaluator at the Marin Humane Society in Novato, Calif. "So every-

body has been doing 'Buns Day' for the past four or five years. She owns a Pilates exercise studio, and ... she and her trainers have special classes that are all focused on getting your 'booty' in shape," Schaaf says. "There's food, there's a silent auction, and there are rabbits on site. Each time, we've raised \$4,000 to \$5,000."

Suzanne D'Alonzo, animal care manager for the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria in Virginia, works with staff members who do