



The Pet Rescue Foundation

OFFSITE ADOPTIONS

Satellite Adoption Centers

By Vicky Crosetti, Executive Director

Humane Society of the Tennessee Valley

The Humane Society of the Tennessee Valley (HSTV) opened Adopt-A-Pet, a satellite adoption facility in August of 1992. Before this center opened, our adoption rate was a dismal thirteen percent (13%). Our traditional, open-access shelter is located in a low income, hard to find area of Knoxville. Our closest neighbors are a quarry and a toxic waste site. Our shelter itself is a hodgepodge structure, which was built and added on to in the 1950's and early 1960's.

When we decided to aggressively pursue raising our adoption rate, we knew that we had to bring our animals to the adopting public, not continue to hope that they would somehow overlook all of the negatives surrounding our shelter and come there to adopt. Further, we were aware that some people will not come into even very inviting traditional shelters because they know that animals are euthanized there.

The establishment of Adopt-A-Pet was made possible through the generosity of a single donor who also happened to be a volunteer at our shelter so had firsthand knowledge of how few people chose to come in to adopt.

We had no models to look to when we decided to open Adopt-A-Pet. The issues we were faced with included:

- Location, specifically lease prices versus location. We chose location and we chose correctly. We leased a fourteen hundred (1,400) square foot free standing building located on the main street artery through Knoxville which also happens to be very near a freeway exit. Visibility and accessibility are critical to the success of a satellite facility.
- Name, what to call the facility. "Adopt-A-Pet" was chosen because it accurately and succinctly defined the mission and further, the name would put us at the top of the yellow page listings for pet stores.
- Hours of operation, planning opening and closing times that would make it easy for people to come in to adopt. Initially, we were open M-F 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Sunday 1p.m. (allowing us to capture the after church crowd) to 6 p.m. (These hours were later changed slightly when we opened our second satellite at PETsMART.)
- Motif, an interior design that would make people feel welcome and encourage them to spend time at the center. We consulted with a designer and chose an animal nursery theme.

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- Signage, how much to spend and what type of sign to attract maximum attention. This was a problem due to Knoxville's very strict sign ordinance. We opted to spend the money necessary to get the largest lighted sign we were allowed. We also placed an enormous banner flag on our roof that is visible from the freeway. We put floodlights around the perimeter of the building to attract further attention at night. We periodically put out flags, seasonal decorations, lawn ornaments, etc. to capture drivers' attention as they pass the center.
- Animal spaces, how much space to allocate to canines, how much to felines. This was determined utilizing our existing statistics on adoptions and included analyzing how many adult dogs of each size (small, medium, large) were generally adopted.

A common cattery was constructed which can comfortably hold eight (8) adult female or neutered male cats. Kittens are displayed in the lobby area in wire ferret cages with different level shelves and hammocks in them. Generally, about sixteen (16) kittens total are kept in these cages. We do not put intact adult male cats at our adoption centers because of the odor problem. Interestingly, we quickly discovered that the adult cats housed in the cattery tended to break with upper respiratory disease at a far lower rate than cats housed in cages at the shelter. After learning this, we designed a common cattery at our shelter and experienced a similar decline in upper respiratory problems.

Our dog adoption area is designed so that large and medium adult dogs are in one room and puppies and small dogs in another. Potential adopters must pass through the room containing the large and medium canines before they can enter the puppy and small dog room. This has helped increase adoptions of large and medium adult dogs. We house a total of twenty-one (21) canines at any given time. Large dogs are displayed in T-Kennels™, all other dogs are in stainless cages. Canines are rotated throughout the day into outdoor play/exercise areas that are visible from the street, attracting attention and potential adopters. Due to the rotation schedule, many of our canines are either completely housebroken or well on their way by the time they are adopted.

- Choosing animals to go to a satellite facility. Initially, we experimented with choosing the animals to send; we sent a mix of animals we knew would be most "desired" along with some of our "hard luck" cases. We found quickly that we could save more lives if we sent the "cream of the crop" - animals which would be rapidly adopted. We still occasionally send a "Cinderella" dog or cat but we generally reserve these spaces for animals who will be adopted quickly. *Note: no animals are taken in at our current satellite centers. All animals are transferred from the shelter.*
- Retail space. When we opened Adopt-A-Pet, our lobby was largely devoted to retail space. We sold pet food, leashes, animal note cards and jewelry, etc. However, the only items that sold well were those directly related to the adopted animal such as food, litter boxes, collars and leashes. For several years, these retail sales helped make Adopt-A-Pet profitable. However, as soon as the first large warehouse type pet supply store opened in Knoxville, our retail sales became negligible and we devoted the extra lobby space to more kitten cages and a puppy "play pen".

- Adoption fees. When Adopt-A-Pet opened, our adoption fee was just \$45. The adoption fee was increased later to \$60, then \$75 in 1997 when we began our in-house spay/neuter program, and finally to \$97 in January 1999. This fee includes spay/neuter, vaccination (DHLPP and Bordatella for canines; FCR for felines), worming for intestinal parasites, heartworm testing for dogs, feline leukemia and lenti virus testing for cats and a microchip. At no time when fees were raised did we have complaints from the public and in fact, adopters tell us they think our adoption fee is a “great deal”.
- Adoption policies. HSTV adoption policies are the same at all facilities. While some may feel our guidelines are too stringent (pets already in the home must be altered and current on veterinary care; no outside cats or dogs on chains allowed; no young puppies/kittens adopted to families with children under the age of five, etc.), we believe that while careful screening and placement may potentially reduce the overall number of adoptions, it increases the number of successful adoptions. We are committed to placing animals in homes where they will remain for life. Donors, too, tell us regularly that they appreciate the care with which we place animals.
- Budget. The cost of space renovation and equipment purchases was about \$45,000. Adopt-A-Pet was initially profitable, as described above. However, in the past several years, the Society has subsidized the center. (Thirty thousand dollars in fiscal 1999.) These costs, however, are defrayed by profit made at our other satellite center at PETsMART. (Described below.)

The community response to Adopt-A-Pet was immediate and far greater than we had expected. In the first full year of operation, our adoptions rose to a little over twenty percent (20%). Adoption percentages continued to rise through 1998 at thirty three percent (33%). Adoptions dipped slightly in 1999. We attribute this to a sharp drop in the number of animals coming into our shelter and the fact that the number of puppies (the most popularly adopted animal) coming into our shelter has declined significantly. We attribute this drop in incoming numbers in large part to the fact that we began spaying and neutering all adopted animals prior to release in 1997. Prior to that, even though spay/neuter was free for adopted animals at local veterinary hospitals, only a sixty percent (60%) confirmed compliance rate was ever achieved. Further in January, 2000, we began a free spay/neuter and vaccination program for low-income families.

In May 1998 we established yet another adoption satellite center when we entered a partnership with PETsMART to save even more lives. Our animals (dogs, cats, and the occasional rabbit) are available for adoption at Luv-A-Pet all hours that PETsMART is open, seven days a week. Our trained and paid staff mans the center. Adoptions increased dramatically again when we began working with PETsMART.

	Community Adoptions	Number Off Site	Percent Off Site
1992	2,294	1,277	55%
1994	3,382	2,210	63%
1999	3,455	2,653	76%

Our contracts to house animal control animals for Knoxville and Knox County will end December 31, 2000. Our old shelter will close and a new center, Adopt-A-Pet North, will become the headquarters for HSTV.

We are leasing a 10,000 square foot space located in a strip mall in the fastest growing area of the community. This site fronts a major artery whose traffic count is higher than the nearby freeway. This new facility will house HSTV administration, animal intake, a large adoption area, a spay/neuter clinic to service our own animals in addition to providing low cost sterilization and other medical services to the general public, a dog training area, professional grooming services, and an education area.

Projected cost for renovation is about \$400,000; equipment about \$200,000. Estimated expenses for the first year are \$738,000; estimated income \$461,000. The balance will be made up by donations and grants. Income is projected to rise as the community becomes more and more aware of the new center.

It should be noted that while satellite adoption centers may not be profitable unless linked to something like a thrift shop or other income producing enterprise, the intangible benefits are enormous. The first, of course, is increasing the number of lives saved. Not to be discounted though are: increased positive visibility in the community, increases in the number of volunteers due to differing locations and hours, increased number of visitors to a Humane Society facility which offers endless opportunities to educate the public face to face.

A word of advice to any organization planning to open a satellite facility: the keys to success are clean and healthy animals, a spotless facility, and a staff tuned to customer service. Like any retail establishment, you may only have one opportunity to impress the “customer”. And impressing the customer begins long before they ever enter the building. Parking lots should be free of debris and landscaping well maintained. The exterior of the building should be attractive (no peeling paint or buckling siding). We have containers filled with colorful flowers and plants surrounding our building and outside exercise areas.

Finally, the public must be able to rely on the fact that these centers will be open regular hours on the same days every week, something I feel can only be accomplished by utilizing paid staff who may be assisted by volunteers. We had tried “mobile” adoptions, taking animals to a variety of locations at different times, but found that stationary satellite centers have proven far more successful.

Anyone seeking further information about the Humane Society of the Tennessee Valley’s satellite adoption centers may contact Vicky Crosetti, Executive Director online at HSTV.org or at 865-573-9675.