

# What to do if you find a stray dog or cat

**BY CAROL CARIDAD**

*President, Paws 4 You Rescue*

*Q: Help! I found a dog, what do I do (this applies to cats, too)?*

Being involved with various rescue groups for many years, this question haunts me no matter where I go. I would like to address the stress and frustration you are feeling when you find a stray as well as share with you the mutual stress and frustration the person you are asking for help from feels.

So you now have picked up a stray and can't keep it because you already have a dog and a cat, maybe 2 or 3; your husband might divorce you if you bring home another; you live at home with your parents and they'll throw you out; it's digging in your garden; you're not allowed to have pets or another pet where you live; you work too much; your other pets don't like it; you're allergic; and the list goes on. And you want a rescue group to "take" the animal you rescued because you don't want it to get "killed."

If you call an individual rescue organization, the person on the line hears — another stray, this is the 10th call today, our rescue group has no funding, no space, no foster homes, no help, in my personal house I have six dogs already, five cats, haven't worked my paying job today, my husband is patient but at his limit, my house is a mess, I'm tired, I look like hell, I've been at the vet's office with the rescues all morning long, and I still need to go to the shelter to pick up a dog I have on hold that will be euthanized at the end of the day if I don't make it, ugh! I need help too!

So now you understand why many rescue groups may not return phone calls. I have read that approximately 12 million animals are being euthanized every year in the United States, that is one million a month, 1,388 animals an hour; can't you foster the stray temporarily? Our very own Animal Services Department on 74 Street and the Palmetto Expressway is reported to euthanize 100 to 150 animals every single day. This is horrifying! Individual rescue groups cannot take full responsibility for the animals that we find every day, especially because we depend on donations from the community. Most of these organizations are volunteer-based, which means those volunteers need to work to pay their bills, take care of their families and have their own sets of responsibilities.

If you find yourself picking up a stray, take it to a local veterinarian and have it scanned for a microchip. You will then most likely witness another frustration that rescuers face, it has no microchip, never registered or the owner moved and never updated the information. At this point, make a com-



mitment not to keep the animal, but to give it a temporary safe place to live, and then partner with a rescue group to find a qualified new owner (and offering a donation for their involvement is the proper thing to do). The stress you will feel is only temporary and you will be able to sleep at night knowing that you truly saved the pet and did not take the easy way out and drop it off at Animal Services, where the animal has a minimal chance of survival. You can make a difference.

The stress of finding a stray is a pure example of the importance in responsible pet ownership. Just this morning, an 11-year-old golden retriever ran into my yard with no collar or visible identification. The dog had strolled into my yard about six months ago the same way — no collar or identification. It makes me cringe that my very own neighbors don't spend \$6.95 on a name tag made right in front of you at the local pet supply store (and I am not referring to a rabies tag). No excuses, this is the same way most of the dogs end up at Animal Services; it only takes one time. This is why one of the first things we teach our children is to recite their name and phone number.

On behalf of Paws 4 You Rescue, I hope this column sheds a little light on what to do when you find a stray. I urge you to try partnering with your local rescue groups; you might just find a great group of people, share a similar passion and give life a second chance.

Please visit our web site for a list of our adoptable pets and additional information on our organization. And visit us at Petsmart (Falls location) every Sunday from 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.

## **BEAGLE MANIA**

Have you thought about adopting a beagle? They make great family pets and we've got them for adoption. Gizmo is male beagle, about two years old, 20 pounds, likes kids and other dogs, very friendly. To meet him and for more information, call 786-242-7377 or email <info@paws4you.org>.

*Paws 4 You Rescue is a non-profit, volunteer-run organization dedicated to giving life a second chance. Our mission is to save animals from euthanasia, re-homing abandoned pets, providing necessary medical treatments, as well as educating the community on the importance of spaying and neutering. Please contact us with any questions.*