

Date

Name

Address

City State Zip

Dear Name,

Greetings! We hope this letter finds you safe, healthy and warm as we embark into 2021!

In previous years, my husband Ed and I have had the pleasure of personally hosting an annual reception to thank and inform Midlands Humane Society's leadership (\$1,000+) donors. With heavy hearts, we will not be doing so this year due to Covid-19. However, we still want to thank you and provide an update on how your generous investment was used in 2020 because we, as donors ourselves, understand how important it is to know our donations are used wisely. As volunteers and board members, we are fortunate to witness that this is the case and want to share a glimpse of this with you.

So, with that in mind, think of this as our personal message to you, as fellow donors and animal lovers...kind of like a really, really long 2020 holiday letter!

COVID-19 - We are so pleased to report that MHS never had to close its operations due to Covid-19 and staff were able to provide crucial services to animals in need all 366 days of 2020! At times they had to convert their public interactions to appointment only, suspend volunteer activities at the shelter and either cancel or modify off-site adoption events and fundraisers. Through all of this, the staff and volunteer team stayed flexible and adapted to the fluid environment.

The second thing we are excited to share involves adoptions. When the pandemic first began, there was tremendous concern within the animal welfare community that a massive number of pets would be surrendered to shelters by owners who were worried about finances, being able to care for them if they fell ill, or even worrying that their pet might infect them with the virus. Shelters were encouraged nationwide to quickly grow their foster programs in preparation for the space shortages this would cause, as well as the possible facility shutdowns from mandates if shelters were deemed "non-essential". We can't tell you how relieved we were when the exact opposite happened! It turned out that as people spent more time at home, many decided to add a new pet in their lives and adoptions of dogs, cats and other pets skyrocketed!

Little Miss, Hercules and Yogi – All adopted and now MHS "Alumni" thanks to your support!



Adoptions remain strong as we begin 2021. In fact, in certain parts of the country (including ours) *there is actually a shortage of adoptable shelter cats and dogs right now*. That was not a typo – there is currently a shortage - and what a great problem to have when you’re trying to ensure every adoptable pet has a home! As a result, MHS has the opportunity to bring in animals from other shelters that are overcrowded and experiencing high euthanasia rates so that they, too, will get their second chances.

Personally, I am so excited to see MHS being able to meet the needs of local animals while also rescuing other homeless pets and bringing them to our community where adoptive families are waiting with open arms to welcome them. This effort does not come without its challenges though – such as transportation and medical assessments, quarantines and treatments – but the team is doing everything they can to save these precious lives.

SHELTER ANIMAL ENRICHMENT - Although animal enrichment has always been a priority at MHS, special attention was given to it in 2020. Animal enrichment programs address the mental health and emotional contentment of animals at the shelter and examples include dog walking and cat socialization. Enrichment became increasingly important in 2020 when there were fewer volunteers and visitors in the building for the animals to interact with.

A great example of an improvement in **feline enrichment** would be when one of our board members, Cheryl Morris (who headed up the conservation program at the Henry Doorly Zoo), met with staff and gave them some great ideas, particularly for our felines. She suggested bringing in feathers fallen from ducks or other birds for the cats to play with and investigate. A rather humorous and surprising tip she offered was telling staff that the big cats at the Zoo are fascinated by old perfume. The Zoo’s enrichment staff regularly spritz the logs, rocks, and walls with these assorted floral or spicy scents and the cats are entertained and intrigued for hours. Luckily, MHS has a few staff members and volunteers who have access to chickens so they keep us well stocked on spent bird feathers. We also have staff who rummaged through family members’ bathroom cabinets in search of vintage Avon and drugstore perfume bottles to offer to our shelter kitties.

MHS staff and volunteers are committed to making each day a good day for our shelter kitties.



A big advancement in **canine enrichment** came when Rachael Wilson, the MHS Director of Behavior, traveled to Colorado in late 2019 to train for a program called “Dogs Playing for Life” (DPFL). This

program utilizes carefully facilitated playgroups to allow dogs to expend pent up energy and feel both mentally and physically content. However, playgroups help in ways that go far beyond exercise. Staff and volunteers are able to evaluate the dogs on a different level to get an idea of how they will do around different types of dogs and in different environments.

Playgroups have played a huge role in training programs as well, since dogs are honestly the best teachers for other dogs! With playgroups, they see more progress with unsocialized, fearful or reactive dogs than they ever did in just one on one training sessions. The information learned from playgroups greatly enhances the adoption matching process as well, providing for the best fit when finding a home.

Playgroups have been a real “game changer” at MHS



A funny story...Before I knew anything about DPFL, I showed up at MHS for a meeting and noticed about a dozen dogs frolicking in the shelter play yard – tumbling, chasing, playing and running at full speed with their tongues hanging out. I had never seen a large group of shelter dogs together like that and it made me smile to see them so incredibly happy. However, I was a little concerned since I didn’t know about DPFL and wondered if it was safe. After learning about the program and how it’s administered, my mind was put to ease and I am so happy we have this at MHS.

As you can see from the sequence below, this dog REALLY appreciates playgroup!



SERVICE ENTERPRISE CERTIFICATION - Since late 2018, MHS staff have been participating in an 18-24 month program to become a certified Service Enterprise Organization through the Points of Light Foundation. Funded through a grant from Best Friends Animal Society, this comprehensive program strengthens nonprofit capacity through the strategic use of volunteers and their skills. Along with a network of peer humane societies, MHS staff participate in regular strategic planning and training sessions designed to facilitate the reengineering of their volunteer program and the corresponding organizational culture shift.

Progress slowed a bit in 2020 thanks to Covid-19, but the team is on track to become certified early this year. The revamped program provides the infrastructure to build a better, more engaged volunteer team and we have witnessed the transformation in many ways.

An excellent example would be the creation of unique training opportunities for volunteers. These include the positions of Canine Coach, Training Team, and Playgroup Team. Canine Coach training involves learning how to teach basic obedience skills, manners, and leashing techniques. After a volunteer has been certified as a Canine Coach, they can move on to becoming a member of the Training Team. These volunteers work with dogs who have greater degrees of behavioral challenges such as signs of severe dog reactivity or possible bites on their record. The Playgroup Team helps monitor the dogs while they are in the play yard, using skills gleaned from DPFL.

Canine Coaches in Training



Another improvement to the volunteer program was increased emphasis on communication and appreciation. A private Facebook page was created for volunteers so they can enjoy their camaraderie and keep up with what is happening at MHS, including adoption and post-adoption updates on the animals they have cared for. A new event in 2020 was an outdoor movie night for volunteers, so that MHS could show appreciation while maintaining proper social distancing.

Movie Night was a big hit!



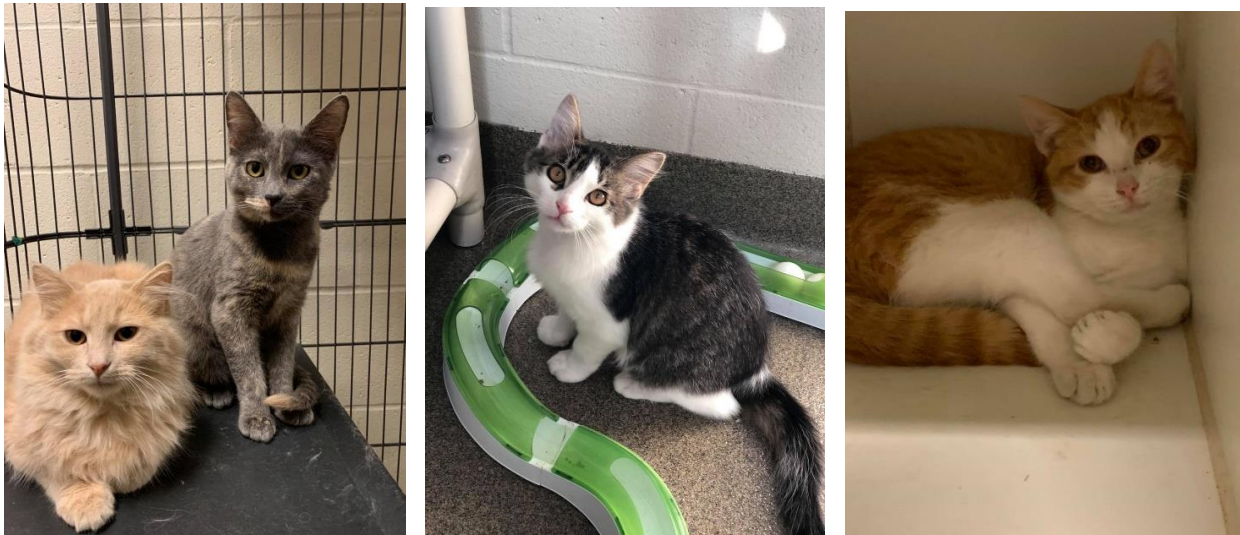
Volunteers donate thousands of hours each year and MHS simply couldn't do their wonderful work without them! We see this as a win-win situation as the volunteers get to enjoy the satisfaction derived

from making a difference in a cause they care deeply about and MHS is able to expand their workforce with dedicated staff without adding to their budget.

FINDING THE BEST HOMES AND SAVING LIVES - During every leadership reception presentation, I emphasize the value-add that MHS provides by properly matching animals with their prospective homes and by “going the extra mile” for pets who need it. 2020 was no exception as the following stories will illustrate.

The **Working Cat** program placed 62 cats into homes in 2020. Since the program was launched in 2019 a total of 148 cats have found homes. These cats are otherwise unadoptable due to their lack of socialization and fear of people. This program gives them a second chance living in barns, garages, and outbuildings, often helping to control the rodent population. They are spayed/neutered and vaccinated before adoption and their new owners are required to provide daily food, water, and shelter. In some cases, these cats learn to trust people and become friendly, but if not, at least they can live their lives and have a place to call home.

These kitties found their second chances through the Working Cat program!



A good Samaritan brought in **Lieutenant Dan**, an injured kitten who suffered from both damaged and deformed hind legs. This poor boy was obviously in pain and they feared massive infection might set in, as it appeared he had been dragging himself around causing a large open wound on his back left leg. Although there wasn't much of a leg present, local veterinarians determined the remaining bone and tissue would need to be amputated. His other back leg would remain intact and he would have to explore the world a little differently moving forward.

After surgery, he went to an MHS foster home to continue his healing and learn to navigate with his new physique. He even had a foster brother who was also an amputee and looked like he could have been his twin! They played and rough-housed endlessly as if nothing was even wrong. After his recovery, he was adopted and is now enjoying life in his forever home.

Lieutenant Dan was able to recover in a loving foster home, and even had a buddy to play with!



Theo was a Pitbull mix puppy who was originally surrendered at 4 months old for being too rough in the home. He was quickly adopted but returned only a few days later for being “aggressive”. Theo was an ornery puppy who lacked training and was very mouthy and pushy. Staff knew that if they did not get ahead of his behaviors there was a very big chance he would be adopted and returned several times in the future.

He immediately went into daily training where they worked on his basic commands (sit, down, stay) and his loose leash walking. They focused on his “drop it” & “leave it” commands to help with his mouthing while teaching him not to put his teeth on people. Theo also went to playgroup where he learned bite inhibition and received both mental and physical exercise.

Theo was adopted by a woman out of state who had a lot of experience with the breed and was a volunteer at the shelter in her hometown. Staff met with her to fully explain his history and what his needs were and were also able to show her the training he already knew so she could replicate it in the future. Theo’s new owner, who renamed him Japhy, got him into training right away and he is doing absolutely amazing. He even has a new baby brother! His new mom blogs about him at lovedogs.blog which has been a delight to staff and volunteers who worked with him!

Theo (now Japhy) just needed some extra training to succeed!



Theo is just one example of how MHS goes the extra mile for animals with special needs. Sometimes, in more extreme cases, this even includes providing following up training and/or consultation to help the pets adapt to their new homes.

Oreo was a surrendered cat, who had been bottle fed by the owner and lived a very secluded life. Because of this she was extremely selective of people (did not tolerate men) and could not be around other animals. Since she was bottle fed, life as a working or barn cat was not an option. She was an extremely long-term resident due to her needing a very specific home. Being on the adoption floor helped with her socialization, but she definitely needed a home with a woman owner. Two women saw Oreo online, met her and adopted her - and now she's living the good life!

MHS found Oreo a new home that was the “purrfect fit” for her!



The last story is about **Razzle and Dazzle**, both 12 year-old female terrier mixes who were surrendered together. Because they were so bonded, staff knew it was important to try to keep them together. However, finding someone to adopt two dogs at once can be a challenge - especially when those dogs are seniors. Staff went right to work promoting their adoption as a bonded pair. Thankfully, a young couple fell for them and gave them a home where they can live out their golden years together.

When these two souls were surrendered after twelve years of being together, the only family they had left was each other. I am so thankful that MHS recognizes and prioritizes keeping bonded pairs together whenever possible.

Razzle and Dazzle – these bonded seniors were able to find their second chance together!



In closing, I want to list a few other characteristics that Ed and I consider important when supporting MHS. These are in addition to the high-quality care and services provided to the animals but, nevertheless, are crucial to the organization's success.

- Leadership is provided by a very capable and dedicated Executive Director, Nikki Cruickshank.
- Staff is qualified, well trained and committed, with extremely low turnover.
- Governance is strong, with an engaged and diverse Board of Directors.
- Finances are closely monitored, with a focus on maximizing resources without sacrificing quality.

I hope that you find this information as uplifting and inspiring as we do and are feeling superb about your charitable investment in MHS! Thank you for believing in MHS and supporting their mission!

If you have any questions or ever want to chat or text about MHS, feel free to reach out to myself at 402-981-7507 or Ed at 402-630-3751. Again, we regret that we weren't able to gather in person this year to thank you and inform you, as well as celebrate another successful year for MHS, but we look forward to doing so in the future!

Until then, stay safe and stay healthy!

Linda (and Ed) Kemp