

The Big Hearts of Hoof & Paw

Volunteers Work for Animal Welfare

Ashley Ghere
Contributor

BLYTHEWOOD/FAIRFIELD – They go about feeding the hungry and saving the lost. But they aren't a church. They're members of The Hoof & Paw Benevolent Society, a non-profit, volunteer Blythewood/Fairfield County based animal welfare group organized three years ago with the purpose of working closely with the Fairfield County Animal Shelter and Adoption Center to promote spay/neuter programs and raise awareness for the adoption and fostering of shelter animals.

But they frequently far exceed their goals according to David Brown, Director of Animal Control at the Fairfield County Animal Shelter. "We couldn't do what we do without their help," Brown said. "There's a lot of heartbreak when some of these animals come in or we go out and find certain conditions. But these volunteers are right there helping us make the best of bad situations."

According to Minge Wiseman, the group's vice president, they come to the aid of cats and dogs, "but we've also been instrumental in the nurture and rehabilitation of neglected horses and donkeys and we've rehomed a pig or two." It was Wiseman who helped Brown find homes for two badly malnourished and neglected horses two summers ago. She even gave the horses a home and cared for them until permanent homes were found.

"They're dedicated and believe in the cause," he said. "They're hands on."

To that end, members of the group run adoption events, sponsor spay and neuter clinics, assist with abused animals, hold educational events, help with housekeeping and organizing duties at the adoption center, walk dogs, play with the cats and raise funds to pay for spaying and neutering that the County couldn't otherwise afford – all for animals who don't have anyone else to help them.

The members do what they do for the love of the animals – all animals. They sometimes bring the shelter pets to their own homes for short foster visits to help them become more comfortable and socialized before adoption. According to Deborah Richelle, the newly elected president of the group, a little time spent on the leash or in someone's home can make a big difference.

Following the sudden death last fall of the group's former president, Shirley Locklair, the members have regrouped and sallied forth. They hold a monthly meeting in Blythewood at Lizard's Thicket on the first Thursday of each month at 6:30 p.m.

Wiseman said their focus is the same as it was under Locklair's leadership, but a new initiative will place an even greater emphasis on a comprehensive spay/neuter program for Fairfield County in the near future.

"We must make an all-out effort to get pet owners to spay and neuter their animals," Wiseman said. "The reproducing of more and more cats and dogs is causing monumental, painful, expensive problems for the animals, for everyone. We have to do something. And we need more new members who are interested in making this happen." Wiseman said



Several members of the Blythewood/Fairfield County Hoof & Paw Society governing board gathered last weekend at Minge Wiseman's horse farm off Blythewood Road to show off rescues and recruit new members. They include, from left, Chris Reynolds, treasurer, feeding an apple to Wiseman's rescued Thoroughbred Sweet William; Paula Spinale, secretary, holding rescue Trixie; Deborah Rochelle, president, holding rescue Happy; Wiseman, vice president, holding her dog Bud and Kathy Faulk, a prospective member, with her Golden Retriever Lila.

the group is also looking for property owners who will lend a pasture now and then so that abused and neglected horses and livestock can be maintained while abuse cases are prosecuted. "We don't have that now," Wiseman said. "Without a place to keep these large animals, they can't be seized from the neglectful or abusive owners."

"Hoof & Paw is always seeking new members in the community who have an interest in animal welfare," Richelle said. "We welcome any level of support, whether it's liking our Facebook page (hoofandpaw SC), making a donation, coming to meetings or spending time assisting at the shelter. We work closely with David (Brown) and Janice Emerson the adoption coordinator at the Center, to be sure our efforts are focused toward the shelter's most criti-

cal needs. David and Janice have created a wonderful environment where the animals are well taken care of and prepared to go to new homes. They're so compassionate and do their best to limit euthanasia, which is very important to us," Richelle said.

Networking within the county and beyond is a big part of the group's activity. They are always looking for opportunities to visit and speak at community meetings such as the Lions club and build relationships with shelters in neighboring areas.

Richelle said the group's goals are big, but the work is imperative.

"There's so much to be done," she said. "It's a never-ending challenge. We're driven by the need that we see in the community – the abuse and neglect of animals, and the proliferation of un-

wanted animals. We encourage everyone to keep an eye out for animals in the community that might need help. Our goal is to try to get them to a better place."

The Society's next community event will be a Valentine's Day adoption outreach, 'For the Love of Your Pet,' at the Tractor Supply on Killian Road, Saturday, Feb. 14 from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. Several shelter animals will be available for adoption, and a photo book will feature other adoptable pets at the shelter. Dog treats will be for sale as a fundraiser. For more information, email hoofandpaw.fc.sc@gmail.com. Their next regular monthly meeting will be held Thursday, Feb. 5 at Lizard's Thicket in Blythewood. Brown will be there to speak to the group and to help orient newcomers to the work.



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