

Animal welfare during a pandemic

BY LAURA AHEARN

The larger-animal welfare organizations serving the Applegate Valley had different responses to Governor Brown's March 23 "stay home, stay safe" order. Our two county shelters are required by law to accept dogs found or surrendered in their jurisdictions. Strays obviously could not follow the "stay home" order, so these shelters continued to accept at least some intakes.

Jackson County stopped accepting feral cats, rabbits, and small exotic pets, while the onset of "kitten season" placed dozens of new-born kittens with Friends of the Animal Shelter volunteers. With regard to adoptions, Josephine County acted early and closed its shelter to walk-in traffic on March 19, allowing specific pet-human introductions and adoptions to continue by appointment. Jackson County followed suit on March 23.

A huge effort successfully moved as many animals as possible from the Phoenix shelter into foster homes, both to minimize the necessity for staff, volunteers and trustees to be in close proximity inside the shelter and to free up space in case of a surge in incoming lost and abandoned animals. At the time of writing this article, that surge had not (yet) happened. Adoptions have continued at an encouraging pace, and the population of pets waiting for homes is low. However, in spite of screening or placing for adoption only 10 dogs through mid-April, there

was *still* an Applegate dog in the kennels. Happily, a family selected Ruby on the first day the vet techs cleared her to go into adoption.

Private nonprofit groups like Southern Oregon Humane Society (SOHS) and Rogue Valley Humane Society (RVHS) have more latitude in closing down programs and shelters. SOHS stopped its Saving Train, no longer bringing animals from out-of-state, and suspended all adoptions from March 25 until April 21, when adoptions resumed by appointment only. RVHS continued to offer adoptions by appointment, asking interested families to submit a completed application form in advance by email.

Both humane societies conducted drive-up emergency food distribution programs—Wednesdays and Saturdays noon – 2 pm, at SOHS, on Table Rock Road, and Tuesdays noon – 2 pm at RVHS, at 429 NW Scenic Drive in Grants Pass. These pet-food banks continued to operate as of May 1—check their websites for updates.

While this work to help animals continued, other vital services came to a halt. The SNYP (Spay/Neuter Your Pet) clinic, which provided low-cost spay and neuters, closed, and many private veterinarians scaled back hours and procedures. The popular low-cost vaccine clinic at the Phoenix shelter was canceled in March and April. Hundreds



Ruby, hopefully the last Applegate dog at the shelter. Photo: Sunny LeGrand.

of rabies and virus vaccines are provided at these clinics, held on the third Saturday of each month, so hundreds of pets are now unvaccinated and at risk of creating unwanted litters unless their owners could pay far more and secure services at a private vet clinic.

Our community will have a lot of deferred veterinarian care to catch up on. In the meantime, it is more important than ever to keep your pets safely contained on your property or,

better yet, indoors. Don't let them be exposed to rabies or other deadly viruses. Don't let them procreate! And don't let them wander off. The volunteer groups running lost-and-found pet networks have been extraordinarily busy since March. It is never a good time to allow your pet out to wander "because it always comes home" ...and especially not during a pandemic.

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Three Rivers School District adjusts to COVID-19

BY LISA BALDWIN

Three Rivers School District, which includes Applegate and Williams schools, is developing plans and recreating "normal" school events impacted by the COVID-19 epidemic. Personnel are working to close the current 2019-2020 school year successfully, to have support systems in place for the summer months, and to reopen our schools safely in August, as usual.

District officials are working with parents to formulate plans for June high school graduation ceremonies, modified to conform to current state guidelines that limit crowd size and require social distancing. There is a commitment to have "live" ceremonies at each of the district high schools. At Hidden Valley, graduation "could look like" this, according to Superintendent Dave Valenzuela: Four students at a time, each with up to five guests in attendance, would be called

individually to walk across the stage; their names would be read, with some encouraging words; and then the students would get their diplomas and a chance to toss their graduation caps while pictures are taken.

Students who have struggled this spring to complete course work and credits will have access to summer school credit retrieval programs through the summer. Valenzuela notes that academic credit can be awarded through the month of September for the 2019-2020 school year.

The district also plans to keep the outdoor Wi-Fi hotspots they created for the spring school closures "active for the foreseeable future." The testing and transition center at Jerome Prairie School will not reopen until the fall.

For the last several years, our schools have helped successfully transition fifth graders

into middle school and eighth graders into high school with springtime programs, along with the annual kindergarten round-up. Kindergarten registration dates are being planned for the first part of June, and the district will, perhaps, run a Critter Camp in August prior to school starting for 2020-2021.

Transition activities for fifth and eighth graders are tentatively planned for August. As state guidelines are likely to change before then, details have not yet been worked out.

During the summer months, the school district will continue to provide students with weekday meals, although food delivery routes will stop running in early June. Several meal distribution sites will be maintained throughout the district all summer long.

There are some school activities that will not happen this summer. "We

hope to be able to conduct fall sports," Superintendent Valenzuela said, but, "all summer programming is on hold." That includes team training and conditioning. The fall Outdoor Education program for sixth graders is scheduled to take place as in years past.

These are busy days for all our school personnel, who transitioned to online and distance learning with hardly a hiccup. District administration is working to develop the next fiscal cycle's budget amidst all this uncertainty. And the summer, normally a time to rest and recover, offers no respite this year.

The 2020-2021 school year will begin in August, as usual, with the newly approved four-day school week.

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