

From Potomac Almanac, July 8, 2009

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Caring for Animals Is Ageless, Rewarding

By Sharon Allen Gilder

The Almanac

No one could forecast a more perfect day for the Friends of Montgomery County Animals' (FMCA) annual luncheon meeting catered by River Falls Seafood on May 28 than the event's hosts, WUSA9's Chief Meteorologist Topper Shutt and his wife, Alison. The lush landscape of their Potomac home set the stage for 80 members and guests who gathered to support animal welfare. The Shutt's dog Gibby, named in honor of a favorite Washington coach, served as their mascot. Explaining the tri-color Cavalier King Charles Spaniel's moniker Shutt said, "His name is all for Coach Gibbs coming back into town."



Gibby, the Shutt's Cavalier King Charles Spaniel..

Board president and Potomac resident Claire Proffitt noted that FMCA is all volunteers with few administrative expenses in her address to the gathering. Ninety percent of funds raised go directly to animal care.

Recent cases benefiting from FMCA's help include: Timmy, an eight-year-old cat owned by an elderly woman on a fixed income who is diabetic. FMCA paid for medical tests and food; Jasper, a young dog with seizures whose evaluation and expenses are on-going; Max, a geriatric dog with fatty tumors and Lyme disease. FMCA is paying for Max's Lyme treatment and monitoring the tumors; Sandy "the service dog" is being supported by FMCA with a small monthly subsidy for her veterinary bills; and Eva the Diva, a geriatric four pound Chihuahua with digestive problems has her testing, food and continued monitoring

supported by FMCA.



Alison Shutt, Topper Shutt, Claire Proffitt FMCA board president and Janet Lamkin, FMCA vice-president.

Shutt's rescue efforts extend beyond his lifelong love of dogs. "Actually, I'm kind of a nut. I catch and release pretty much everything, stink bugs, moths, everything else that comes in here." Shutt added, "It is our pleasure to host this event and I can't turn Claire down."

Potomac resident Susan Cameron has been a member of FMCA for five years. "Because animals need a voice. They're my favorite creatures on the planet. We have four cats and our house revolves around their happiness and welfare. My husband and I share our passion about animals. It's a wonderful union for the two of us," she said. Alison Shutt expressed her enthusiasm for the event, "I'm happy to do this. It's such a great cause. The rescue work is important so the animals don't get put down in a shelter. FMCA is an adjunct to the Humane Society that I think is critical."

One of the senior friends of Friends is Virginia Scalzone. She will celebrate her 90th birthday in August. She is a cat sitter for her friend, Cynthia Edwards. Edwards said, "She's someone I trust. I've known her for 25 years." Edwards has been a FMCA member for 15 years. When Scalzone was asked about the secret to a long life she enthusiastically exclaimed, "It's my sense of humor, keeping busy and movement. I'm still hangin' on, but walkin' around. My son fixed my late husband's cane for me to use.

Look at it, I touch it, and leave it where it is.” In addition to the fact that she likes cats and they like her, she wanted to attend the luncheon she said, “Because when I heard about Topper Shutt, I wasn’t going to miss that fella! I watch him faithfully. Whatever he says, I believe!”

MONIES ARE always needed for the organization’s outreach to cats, dogs, horses and the people who create loving homes for them. Longtime Montgomery County resident and FMCA treasurer Winnie Reed shared: “We run at a loss but that’s what we’re here for. When we send out a newsletter, a lot of you respond with donations.” Still the group can use more help financially. Proffitt asked attendees to contribute to the Fix-it Fund that pays for Trap-Spay-Neuter- Release (TSNR) and Trap-Spay-Neuter-Place (TSNP). She issued a challenge by committing personally to match donations up to \$1,000. She added, “We are, and always will be, dedicated to helping solve animal homelessness because of overpopulation by supporting TSNR and TSNP. We are only hampered by the lack of money in the Fix-it Fund. In these hard economic times, the calls for help with dumped cats, many into feral colonies, has dramatically increased. We need to double our efforts to be sure the feral colonies are stabilized by TNR and the friendly cats and kittens are trapped and spayed or neutered and placed.”

Andrew Barto has two Burmese cats. He and his wife are Friends volunteers at the Germantown Pet Smart where FMCA holds cat adoptions. They nurture the cats and clean cages. Barto said, “This was my wife’s idea more than mine but it makes me feel good to help the cats and in some way that they can’t otherwise help themselves. The organization is wonderful and everyone seems to be working for a good cause. I’m glad to be part of it.” North Potomac resident, Carolee Priddy has six cats, two dogs and six horses. She said, “I’ve rescued animals all my life. I’ve lived in my home almost 40 years. People used to open their car doors on farmland and shove their animals out. It was all open country then. It makes me feel good to help and they’re such giving and forgiving animals. My main goal is to find homes for them. I don’t just take them in to keep them.”

Kathy Bonebreak came from Clarksville, Md. to be part of the event. She said, “I’m an animal lover so I’ll go anywhere I have to to be involved.” Her German Short Hair Pointer is 12 years old. Her dog developed breast cancer three years ago and has quickly and thoroughly recovered. Bonebreak also cares for two cats, a Tabby and a Calico, her daughter adopted in New York City from a rescue group. She rented a limousine and gave them a journey to Ocean City, Md. among other stops before nestling into her home in Clarksville. She added, “I also have a goldfish. The Tabby exercises vigorously by banging on the side of the tank to get the attention of the fish. You could say the Tabby is can-tankerous. I keep a lid on the tank to protect the fish.”

Laura VanTassel shared photos of her three dogs, Diesel, Rocket and Luna. They are Belgian Malinois, a breed known for military and police work. They resemble German Shepherds yet enjoy a handsome look of their own. Luna is VanTassel’s therapy dog. She takes her on regular visits to the Oncology ward at Shady Grove Adventist Hospital and to local nursing homes. VanTassel said, “It’s amazing what a dog can do for therapy. We see different people every week. It’s a nice thing to do and on a selfish level, it makes you humble when you think you’re having a bad day.

FOR OVER 15 YEARS Topper Shutt has led the Montgomery County SPCA’s annual Dog Walk in Potomac. Annually on WUSA9’s broadcast, he features the SPCA’s mascot and owners who adopted through MCSPCA. WUSA9 features Petline 9 on air every Thursday at noon when a representative from a humane organization appears with information about an animal seeking adoption.

Shutt said, “It’s a cause near and dear and a great way to get the word out. It’s a great station service to find an owner for a pet.”

For more information visit: <http://www.friendsofmontgomerycountyanimals.com>.