



A visit to a model animal
shelter in Nashville

Description

The Williamson County Animal Center offers creative solutions to the homeless animal problem

By Michael Walsh

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“Found: donkey, timid and sweet. If you’re missing a donkey, the Williamson County Animal Center may be holding it for you. The male donkey with a chocolate stripe down its back was spotted running loose late Sunday... The donkey will be kept for about a month before it’s placed for adoption.”

– *The Tennessean*, March 2015

Have you ever described someone as a “philocynic”? I did recently and received a confused expression in return. As a noun, philocynic describes a dog lover. It is derived from the Greek “philo” – “loving” – and “kuon” – “dog.” The latter referring to **Kuon Khyseos**, the Golden Dog that protected Zeus (god of the sky) as an infant. Upon safely attaining adulthood, Zeus placed the dog into the heavens as the constellation Canis Major. (In case you are wondering, cat lovers are described as “ailurophiles.”)



“Canis Major, Lepus, Columba, Noachi and Cela Sculptoris”, Jehoshaphat Aspin, London 1825 – Image: [Sidney Hall](#), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

I can describe myself and the company I keep as bonafide philocynics. Who else would seize the opportunity to spend an afternoon touring a local animal shelter while visiting Nashville, Tennessee? That is precisely what I did during a recent visit to Franklin, a 20-minute drive from Nashville.

From its establishment in 1978 as a pound and rabies control center... it has grown into an animal center that has a save rate of approximately 98 percent and offers the animals an exceptional level of care.

The facility is known as the [Williamson County Animal Center \(WCAC\)](#) and is in a building behind the Franklin High School grounds. From its establishment in 1978 as a pound and rabies control center, where most of the animals were euthanized, it has grown into an animal center that has a **save rate of approximately 98 percent** and offers the animals an exceptional level of care.



Williamson County Animal Center catio

With approximately **30 staff**, including a full-time veterinarian, complemented with many dedicated volunteers and animal control officers, the center manages an **annual intake of 4000 animals** – 3000 of which are cats. (With the area’s mild climate, cats can produce up to three litters annually.) At the center, the cats have access to two free-roaming rooms (“Meow Manner” and “Purr Palace”) coupled with an individual experienced in cat training.



Resident dog enjoying play time

The volunteers are trained in dog walking and socializing the dogs. They ensure the dogs are walked four times a day and attend a daily training/playtime session. In addition, in partnership with [Project Reward](#), the center

offers obedience training and behaviour modification for dogs at risk of being surrendered by their owners.

Other initiatives aimed at reducing the stress levels of sheltered dogs include structured daily playgroups. These are based on the methodologies endorsed by [Aimee Sadler's Dogs Playing for Life](#) programmes that have proven to enhance a sheltered dog's quality of life.

What is most interesting is how this facility grew from a "pound" to an "animal center" in a region that has approximately 10,000 homeless animals annually and only three shelters to deal with this large intake. (The other shelters are Metro Animal Care and Control and the Nashville Humane Association.)



Williamson County Animal Center dog run

The solution is a multi-faceted approach. One aspect is legislation. Specifically, Tennessee created the nation's first public animal abuser registry that identifies offenders (civilly liable or convicted) of mistreating animals. This registry is an invaluable tool in placing animals into adoption.

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Resident calico cat

Another aspect involves transforming the local business community into a pet-friendly environment by allowing animals into retail establishments and local hotels. In 2017, Franklin tested the concept of [Better Cities for Pets](#) that promotes the benefits of pet ownership. With the city's pet ownership rate at over 70 percent, it was not surprising that over 80 local businesses participated during the programme's first year. Amongst other criteria, local businesses are encouraged to display a decal on their storefronts identifying those welcoming pets and their owners. Two years later, 31 cities nationwide had embraced this concept.

A further aspect is the WCAC's careful selection of corporate sponsorship. To that end, the center is associated with Franklin-based **Mars Petcare**, a business segment of Mars Incorporated. This relationship allows the center to offer special fee-free adoptions on several occasions coupled with "wag bags" contain product samples and educational materials.



WCAC mobile adoption center

Additionally, the center developed several creative approaches to prevent (or alleviate) over-crowding. These included: adopt-a-thons in partnership with other shelters; the acquisition of a **mobile adoption center** that visits special events and local concerts; “clear the shelter” programmes where adoption fees are waived for dogs and cats older than one year of age; two-for-one kitten adoptions; and Christmas morning adopted puppy deliveries.

In all, a success story made possible through dedicated staff and volunteers, community involvement, business partnerships, state legislation and county funding. The result is larger than its individual parts and reflected in the happy expressions of all the animals under their care.

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Finally, the center is currently entering a new chapter, having acquired 38 acres of land for a new building scheduled for completion by the end of 2021. As the well-known idiom states: “the best is yet to come.”



Williamson County Animal Center expansion project

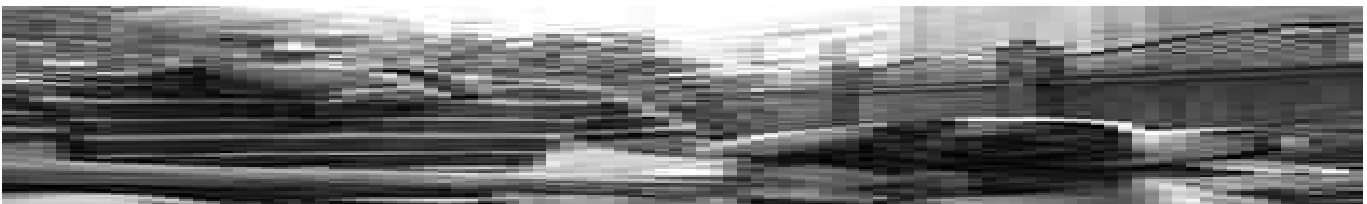
I would like to thank **Ondrea Johnson**, Director, Williamson County Animal Center, and **Scott Pieper** for their hospitality and informative tour of the center.

Images: Michael Walsh

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Michael Walsh is a long-time Westmount resident. He is happily retired from nearly four decades in the field of higher education technology. A “professional student” by nature, his academic training, and publishing, include statistical methodology, mycology and animal psychology. During this period, he was also an officer in the Canadian Armed Forces. Prior to moving to Montreal, he was contracted by the Ontario Ministry of Education evaluating bilingual primary and secondary school programs. Today, he enjoys spending time with his (huge) Saint Bernard while discovering the city’s past and sharing stories of the majestic trees that grace the parks and streets. He can be contacted at michaelld2003@hotmail.com or through his blog [Westmount Overlooked](#)



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