

## A Win-Win for Seniors: Who's Rescuing Who?

Across the country, November is recognized by animal rescue groups as *Adopt a Senior Pet* month. This month-long adoption event highlights and promotes the rescues of older adult shelter residents who still have lots of love to offer and years to be included in the family memory book. According to a survey by Petfinder.com, the typical pet spends about 12 weeks at a shelter before being adopted, while older adult pets often wait four times as long. Senior dogs end up at the Randolph County Humane Society (RCHS) for a variety of reasons- death or illness, or mental or physical impairment of their owners, or change of life style are some of those reasons. Growing old in shelters is not a happy prospect for our pet citizens during their 'golden years' and they deserve another chance at providing companionship in a forever home.

### Benefits of Adopting an Older Dog

1. No chewing and destruction!
2. They are usually house broken, or only need some minor review to 'remember' what you expect of them.
3. They settle in more easily than puppies, and are happy to have a warm bed, a square meal and the security of adults they can count on. What they most desire is love and companionship and to feel safe.
4. Older dogs are often easier to train because of their ability to focus without all those puppy antics and distractions. Often, adult dogs come with previous training and just need to 'brush up' on a few important commands.
5. Though adult and senior dogs need exercise, they no longer move at full throttle and are often happy to take a stroll to the mailbox and back, or roll around in the yard. This reduced need for vigorous exercise is well-suited for families with children or senior dog owners.
6. An older dog's personality and disposition has already revealed itself so you can usually know if it will be happy in a home with children, visiting grandchildren, other dogs, or cats.

### Suggested Benefits of Pet Ownership for Seniors:

Pet ownership has been linked to many positive health outcomes and psychological well-being:

- Lower blood pressure and pulse rate
- Fewer visits to the doctor
- Pet guardians have lower triglyceride and cholesterol levels than those without pets.
- Seniors become more physically active

Positive psycho-social effects of Pet Ownership:

- Pets fight loneliness; less likely to suffer from depression
- Easier to make friends, encourages increased social opportunities and interactions
- Seniors take better care of themselves; pet ownership provides a sense of purpose and self-worth.
- Pets offer affection and unconditional love. They provide a comfort system that helps to lower levels of the stress-inducing hormone, cortisol, and increase the production of the feel-good hormone, serotonin.
- Pets ease loss of a loved one
- Bonding with a pet can provide a sense of security

### Adopt A Senior Pet Month

During the month of November, in honor of National Adopt a Senior Pet Month, RCHS will offer reduced adoption fees on all pets. The adoption fee for Dogs will be \$50, and for Cats, \$10. **Any senior person, age 55 or older adopting a vintage pet, age 5 yrs or older, will have the adoption fees waived.** If you are a senior, or have a senior friend or family member in your life, and you think you or s/he would benefit from canine or feline companionship, consider adult pet adoption from the Randolph County Humane Society. RCHS will be happy to help you find that perfect match.

### The Perfect Match

Finding the right pet will depend, first on the physical condition of the senior. Is the person physically active? There are many senior dogs that enjoy daily walks and are easy to leash walk. And don't rule out larger dogs – many large adult dogs are quite gentle in personality and in movement and make great senior companions. Is the senior physically able to let the dog in and out of the house to "do its business"? Some small dogs are easily paper trained making this routine unnecessary. In many cases, a cat would be a more ideal pet than a dog. Cats do not have to leave the house and function more independently than dogs, yet provide entertainment and loving companionship. Do consider the age and physical condition of the senior pet. Senior pets with special needs that require accommodation are still viable for successful adoption and can present a perfect match for the right adopter but not for all.

Just like prospective adopters, there are senior dogs and cats of every personality, temperament and activity level that can be matched with a senior adopter and his/her lifestyle. Couch potatoes, lap cuddlers, tricksters, fetchers, foot warmers, quiet, vocal, funny, nutty – Know thyself! RCHS staff is experienced and ready to assist in finding a perfect match for you or your senior friend.

### **Forging a Forever Match**

During our Forest Festival Adoption event this year, an older gentleman came looking to adopt a “white Chihuahua.” His previous one had died and she had been his beloved and devoted companion. Working as a RCHS volunteer during the event, I voiced my concern that he may be trying to “replace” his former pet, but he understood and dismissed that concern. He told of his heart surgery and said that he wanted a little white Chihuahua to love and spend his day with. We happened to have a little white Chihuahua back at the shelter who was a cuddler and a lap warmer if ever there was one, and we told him she would be brought to the park the next morning. I told him that she was not “beautiful.” He said that was ok because he wasn’t beautiful, either. I told him she was no “spring chicken” and he laughed and said, neither was he. Well, the next day he was in the park at 9:00 am to meet this little 11 year old white Chihuahua and she became his “perfect match.” A dear friend of his later confided to me that he is absolutely head-over-heels in love with his new home companion. He got just what he wanted and we forged a forever match.

### **Providing Assistance and Support**

Not all seniors need assistance, but family and friends can play a critical role in making a senior-for-senior rescue a success by providing support to the senior adopter. Bringing a pet into a senior home will likely be more successful if the senior has been a previous pet owner, but a housemate, friend, or caregiver who can assist the senior in learning the basic needs and routines of daily care of their pet could make such an adoption the perfect match. Are there accommodations to the home environment that could make a difference? I assisted a senior with an adoption several years ago, and on my first home visit I saw that it would be easy to attach a 20’ line from the kitchen door out to the yard, without obstruction. This allowed the adopter to attach her pet to the line from inside the kitchen so that it could go and ‘do her business’ or just stretch her legs and sniff the air, and then come back to the door when ready to come inside. If a cat is being adopted, helping to create a place for the litter box that is easily

accessible for cleaning could be very helpful. Helping the senior collect the needed supplies for pet care, seeing that it has a collar and identity tags, that related phone numbers are close at hand, and discussing daily schedules and routines could be enormously helpful. Offering to pick up pet supplies or drive to the vet, and checking in periodically could also contribute to adoption success. Some seniors are on fixed incomes and pets cost money. Offers to assist in paying for the costs of pet care, by family members, could provide critical relief to the pet owner.

Finally, the most significant contribution a friend or family member could make, in my mind, would be a commitment to support the adoption ‘for better or for worse’ by being available to pet-sit in the event of an illness or hospitalization, and either agree to adopt the pet in the event of the death or disability of the owner or help secure the arrangements with another pet-lover who agrees to take the pet. Having the pet included in the senior’s WILL is a good idea and can provide tremendous ease of mind, knowing the beloved companion will be provided for in the event of the owner’s death. My daughter has made that commitment to us and we are comforted knowing our pets will continue to be loved and cared for if we are not able.

I am a devoted pet lover, presently have 4 dogs and have adopted 4 from RCHS over the past 11 years. In 2010 we adopted two sibling mini-dachshunds, Hunter and Pepper, whose owner had died. At the end of this year they will be 16 and are still enjoying life. Adopting senior dogs is a very gratifying and rewarding experience. As a senior myself, I can empathize with Hunter whose hearing is shot and who is slow to get moving in the morning, due to arthritis, and Pepper, now blind, who needs assistance in navigating new territory. But Hunter still enjoys nosing around in the gardens and woofing at strangers and Pepper, by golly, always finds her food bowl! At 16 they are still engaged in their world and they have certainly enriched mine. Rescuing them at age 11 and providing them with the love and security of a forever home has been a powerful experience. There is a whole lot of serotonin being produced in this household! I am glad to have the opportunity to promote this wonderful pairing of seniors with seniors and hope it inspires seniors or people who have seniors in their lives to explore the benefits of pet companionship. Who’s rescuing who? It’s a win-win proposition.

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