

Daily Reporter

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PAWS carries on after death of founder

By **Rorye Hatcher** - March 5, 2019

GREENFIELD — About a week after Nancy Rubino died, Lauri Harris stood in the animal shelter Rubino founded and wished for her friend's good counsel.

It wasn't a life-or-death decision, just something about which she would've appreciated a second opinion. Her heart sank when she remembered yet again that she couldn't just poke her head in Rubino's office.

"I just stood there and cried," she said. "I thought, 'I wish I could ask Nancy.'"

Leaders and volunteers at Partners for Animal Welfare Society have had that feeling a lot since Rubino died on Jan. 11. They have continually fielded questions from concerned friends and supporters of the animal welfare organization about its future. Rubino in 2000 helped to found the organization, which uses its shelter, adoption and spay-and-neuter events, fostering and other efforts to reduce the number of cats and dogs euthanized in the county.

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While leaders acknowledge her loss as the face — and arguably, the heart — of the organization, they said they are carrying on with the mission of promoting animal welfare in Hancock County through education, supporting spay-and-neuter of pets, and supporting local and regional animal shelters.

PAWS board president Mike Rubino, Nancy's husband, said he and the organization lost someone they loved and admired greatly, someone who was a true friend to everyone at the organization. His wife is missed not only for her kind nature and love of the animals, but her 40 years of institutional knowledge on animal welfare, he added.

By the time they met in the 1970s, Nancy was already deeply passionate about protecting animals, and her career followed that path: She was an attorney, specializing in humane law; and she worked at shelters in Wisconsin and Michigan for many years before they moved to Indiana, he said.

Wherever they lived, her wish was always to decrease the number of unwanted animals subjected to euthanasia. She often attended conferences and continuing education events,

keeping up with best practices for running shelters and tactics for reducing pet overpopulation.

"She learned we can't adopt our way out of overpopulation, but we can't euthanize our way out of it, either," he said. In the nearly two months since her death, PAWS has continued its three core missions aimed at reducing pet overpopulation: rescuing homeless dogs and cats; hosting adoption events and maintaining the retail store and shelter; and facilitating low-cost spay and neuter of adoptable animals and pets alike.

PAWS transports animals to a Noblesville facility for spay-and-neuter operations, altering about 60 animals per month, or 600 to 700 animals a year, Rubino said. Pets and adoptable animals also receive a general health exam, dental care, vaccinations and microchipping. The effort is supported through grants from the Hancock County Community Foundation.

The facility where PAWS has operated for about eight years can only house cats, so adoptable dogs are fostered offsite. Mike Rubino and the other board members hope one day to have a facility where dogs and cats can both be housed onsite, and where spay/neuter operations can take place instead of the animals being transported outside the county.

While that's a dream for years in the future, PAWS board members and volunteers are increasing their impact on local animal welfare right now.

Recently, the shelter, which is currently housing about 25 adult cats and four kittens, has expanded its reach to housing animals with special needs. While there are always animals with upset stomachs or respiratory problems in shelters, animals with more specialized care needs — like injections for diabetes or other health problems — face a higher risk of being euthanized in overtaxed facilities, said PAWS volunteer Susan Schlundt.

PAWS works with animal management facilities in Greenfield, Indianapolis and Rushville, taking animals that need extra medical care. Right now, Schlundt is caring for Apple, an orange tabby with diabetes that needs insulin injections twice a day; and Ichabod, a young black and white cat who came into the shelter with two litter mates, all infested with fleas.

The juvenile cat is underweight from all his health problems, so Schlundt is working to get him to eat more, she said. She built a special feeding box for him, where he can feel safe while eating and Schlundt's own cats can't get to the food.

Board members said volunteers like Schlundt, a nurse, bring valuable expertise to the organization and ultimately save more animals from languishing in shelters or being put down.

And with the loss of Nancy Rubino, expertise is what PAWS will need moving forward, her husband said.

"It takes 10 of us for one of her," he said.

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Those who wish to have a pet spayed or neutered through PAWS may email pawshancock@gmail.com to learn about available dates.

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