

HANCOCK HAPPENINGS

'IT'S ABOUT THE ANIMALS'

P.A.W.S. celebrates 25 years of caring for pets

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GREENFIELD — An organization that has dedicated thousands of volunteer hours and donations to rescuing animals is reaching a milestone.

Partners for Animal Welfare Society, or P.A.W.S. Hancock County, is celebrating its 25th anniversary this month. Surely Nancy Rubino, who became the heart and soul of the organization, would be proud, says her husband, Michael.

Nancy Rubino was one of the original founders of the group, which formed in 2000 as a nonprofit organization to educate on the role animals play in the community; provide solutions for low-cost medical procedures; and connect animals with forever homes.

Nancy Rubino died in 2019 at the age of 68, and even in her hospital room, Michael says, she had her P.A.W.S. notebook out and tirelessly worked on the organization at all hours of the night.

The Rubinos had worked in animal welfare in Michigan and Wisconsin before moving to Greenfield, and Nancy enjoyed showing up in classrooms and bringing animals for children to see. To this day, he still has people come up to him and say they remember his late wife in the schools.

She also served on a committee to revamp the city's animal shelter, and spoke to local clubs about pet overpopulation. She urged city administration to create animal welfare ordinances and started a program to transport local animals to nearby low-cost spay and neuter clinics.

Her forte was building bridges in the community, Mike Rubino said, both politically and through veterinarians who also saw a need to provide low-cost services for animal welfare.

The events celebrating P.A.W.S.' 25th anniversary this month are all in Nancy Rubino's name, honoring her legacy.

"Absolutely she'd be proud," Michael Rubino said of how the organization continues to thrive.

P.A.W.S. is located at 1224 W. Main St., Greenfield, with a retail store open 4-7 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays and 2-5 p.m. Saturdays. The Paw Print Alley Cattery is open from 10:30 a.m. to noon the first and second Saturday of each month, and 2-4 p.m. the second and fourth Sunday of each month.

P.A.W.S. is planning two events in celebration of its 25th anniversary.

From 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, celebrate the milestone with free microchips, dog food and cat treats for the first 100 pets. Shop at the retail store and enjoy food and refreshments. Pets are welcome — dogs should be leashed and cats in carriers.

"Run for the Rescues" is also coming up: the P.A.W.S. & Pals 5K is at 9 a.m. May 17 with registration open at 7:30 a.m. Take off at Depot Street Park, 251 Depot St., Greenfield. Competitive running or noncompetitive walking are both accepted; pets are welcome to join. Register and learn more at pawshancock.org, or check out information on how to get involved in other upcoming fundraisers like Designer



Purse Bingo June 12.

P.A.W.S. continues to remain a thriving organization with more than 100 volunteers.

Jason Taylor, president of the group, says from the board of volunteers who put in countless hours of work, to those who occasionally clean the cattery or run the retail space — the success of the group is because of the people who care.

"It's a great organization. We've got a pretty solid reputation in the community," he said. "But we're still finding that people don't necessarily know who we are; but we try to spread the word whenever we're out in the community."

He and his wife, Jennifer, have a passion for fostering dogs, and currently have 11 foster puppies at their rural home.

Dogs, rabbits and guinea pigs stay in local homes or farms for adoption, while many of the organization's cats are housed at the cattery or through the Petsmart Adoption Center.

"We've got a dream of finding our forever home," he added. "Currently, we're leasing a couple of spaces and we're hoping within five years, we're able to raise enough money where we can purchase a facility of our own. That way, we can house cats and dogs on site."

The organization does 10-12 fundraisers per year, including pet photos with the Easter Bunny and Santa, bowling, a U.S. 40 yard sale, a motorcycle run and a holiday auction.

The annual P.A.W.S. Pool Party is a



popular event attracting dog lovers to the Kathy Dowling Aquatic Center for a dip in the pool to raise money for the cause. The party is on the final day of the pool season; this year, it's Aug. 20.

Proceeds from fundraisers go to food, medical expenses, microchipping, litter, spay/neuter transport, operating expenses and more, says Mike McGuire, board member and fundraising chair for the organization.

He is looking forward to this month's events in Nancy Rubino's name. Many worked with her and miss her daily. Newer members of the board may not have had the pleasure of knowing her, but are carrying on her mission.

"She was the heart and soul of P.A.W.S. for many years," McGuire said. "She taught so many children in Hancock County about loving and caring for animals during her school visits. She developed our spay/neuter transport program that has fixed thousands of animals in Hancock County, and she helped our volunteers through her mentorship and leadership. We continue the legacy she and her husband Mike created and nurtured for so many years while remembering her motto: 'it's about the animals.'"

Clockwise from top: P.A.W.S. president Jason Taylor is pictured on Monday at the organization's office in Greenfield. P.A.W.S. is celebrating its 25th anniversary in the Hancock County community. // The late Nancy Rubino, a co-founder of P.A.W.S. in 2000, was dedicated to the nonprofit's mission of animal welfare and education. TOM RUSSO/DAILY REPORTER; SUBMITTED PHOTO