

# Pet adoption needs to be taken seriously

By MARIAN GREEN  
Of the Emerald

While students may think happiness is a warm puppy or kitten, local humane society workers say many students take on more than they can handle when adopting pets during the school year.

"We're very reluctant to adopt pets out to students because we wonder what will happen at the end of the term," says Linda Wilcher, a temporary office manager at Lane County Animal Regulation.

Wilcher says pets take more time, money and attention than most college students can afford to give them.

Students have a "very high turnover (of pets) because it's very difficult emotionally for students to keep a pet along with a full-time schedule."

Typically, a student comes to the shelter wanting to adopt a cute little puppy, but several weeks later finds out that the puppy is a "huge full-time commitment, and we end up getting (the dog) back," Wilcher says.

Wilcher says the facility has refused sororities and fraternities dog adoptions because those organizations usually can't guarantee one person will take full responsibility for the pet — especially when the school year ends.

Pet adoptions aren't a problem at University residence halls simply because students aren't allowed pets in their rooms, says Housing Director Dan Williams. He says he's received no reports of students violating that regulation.

The Lane County facility does allow students to adopt pets if they can meet certain criteria, such as providing proper living facilities and proving that their landlord allows pets, Wilcher says.

"We do check those things really carefully," she says.

If a student who has adopted a pet can no longer take care of it, the student may bring the animal to the Green Hill Humane Society.

Carmen Kunkel, manager of the Green Hill facility, says "responsible" students (the only ones she'll let adopt pets from Green Hill) will return those pets to the facility, a practice she encourages.

"Quite a few (students) return them at the end of the year when they're leaving," Kunkel says.

Those returned pets — even though they may be older than average — usually are placed in homes. No time limit is placed on a pet's stay at the facility, Kunkel says.

"We had one in here last year that lasted for eight months. It was adopted a couple days before Christmas," she says.

Nevertheless, many strays are picked up in the University area, adds Kunkel.

Although Green Hill doesn't maintain exact figures for the University area, Kunkel estimates that 15 percent of all cats and 20 percent of all dogs taken to the Green Hill facility hail from the University area.

Green Hill houses as many as 1,100 dogs and cats, but the average is around 1,000.

Just recently, a couple of students said they've left their pets at parents' homes because they found they couldn't give their pets proper attention, Kunkel says.

Green Hill requires similar qualifications as the Lane County facility, and both stipulate that new owners get their new pets spayed or neutered as part of the adoption costs — \$25 for cats and \$40 for dogs, Kunkel says.

Kunkel says she isn't any more wary of students as pet owners than other groups of pet owners. "Not after I talk to them. You can get a good feeling about what kind of people they are."

"They've felt the need to come all the way out here. That gives them some credibility," she says.

Students adopt cats mainly, Kunkel says.

"They like dogs, but I think they realize their lifestyle dictates cats."

Kunkel says Green Hill gets its share of "success stories."

"Just this morning, I got a picture from a girl who says her cat helps her study. That will go on our bulletin board."



Graphic by Max DeRungs

The Green Hill society has one of the best adoption rates in the nation, Kunkel says. Its adoption rate has reached as much as 89.5 percent, while the nationwide average is about 12

percent, she says. Kunkel says Green Hill has a high success rate because the facility guarantees its pets' health, and pets are kept in larger areas than most facilities.

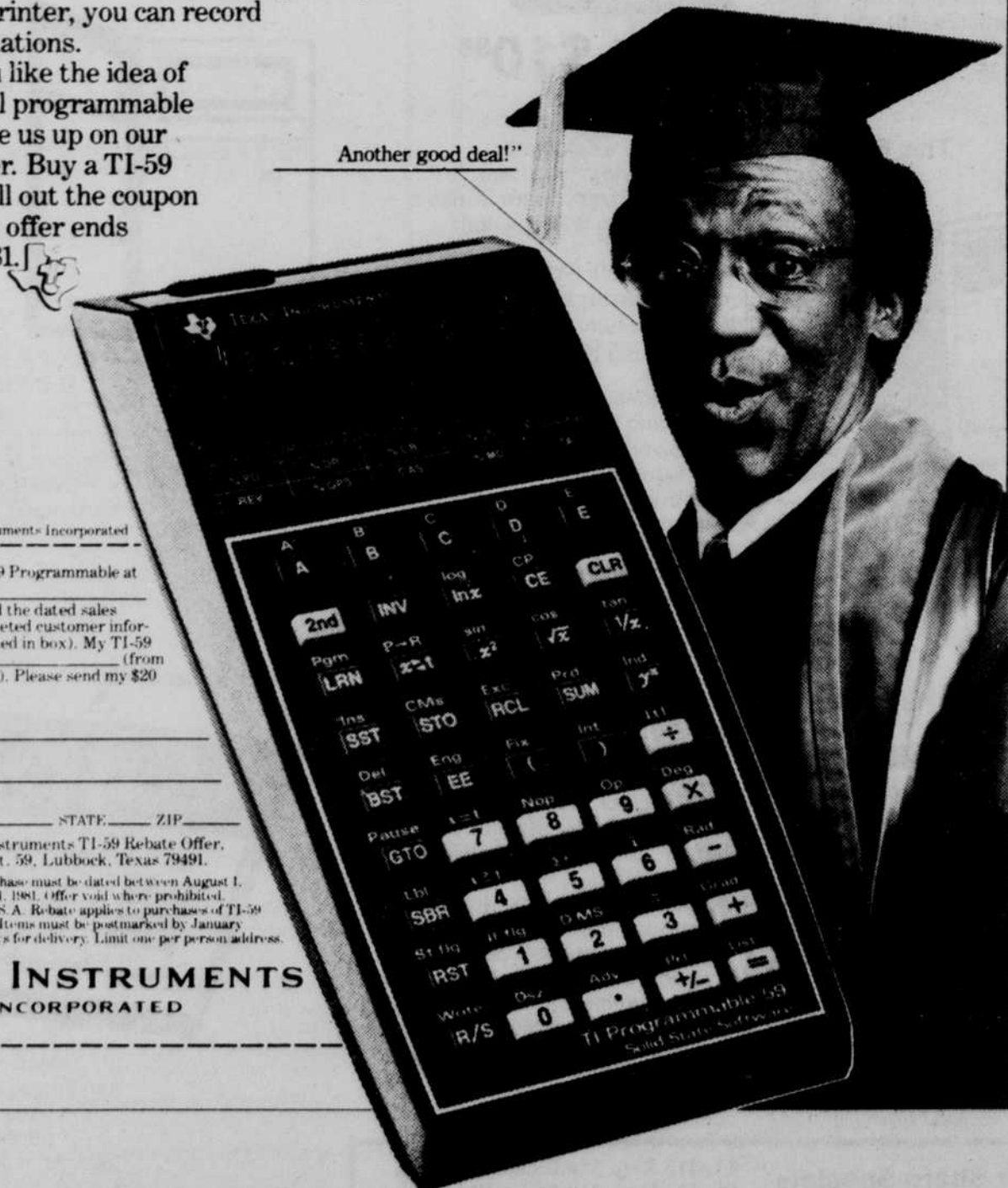
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