FRITZ

PHOTO BY ANNA DORFMAN

FIX YOUR CHI

Little dogs are showing up at shelters

BY AMY SCHNEIDER

Chihuahuas weigh an average of 4 to 6 pounds — that's about the size of a large bunny. The puppies tip the scale at only a few ounces, and yet, Chihuahuas are all canine, descendants of *Canis lupus*, just like huskies, malamutes and Irish wolfhounds.

The diminutive stature of Chihuahuas makes it easy to forget that they're real dogs, not pocket pets or fashion accessories.

That's part of the reason Chihuahuas are the second most common shelter dog, according to Joey Curtain, a volunteer with local nonprofit Stop Pet Overpopulation Today (SPOT). People buy Chihuahuas thinking they don't have all the needs or behaviors of a larger dog, she says.

The Willamette Animal Guild (WAG) recently received a Petsmart "Cherish Your Chihuahua" grant, and with that money WAG and SPOT are partnering to offer $20 spays and neuters for 60 Chihuahuas during the month of August. The nonprofits are also offering $10 spays and neuters for pit bulls throughout the summer.

"We're spotlighting both of these breeds because they're the two predominant ones that end up in the shelters," Curtain says. "Both have a difficult time getting adopted, and the bottom line is that there are more of them than there are homes for them all over the country."

As little dogs, Chihuahuas don't always get the socialization, exercise and training a larger dog might, which can lead to behavior problems. People might also assume that a smaller dog can fit easily into a tiny space and will cost less, which Curtain says isn't true.

"A lot of little dogs in shelters have a really hard time in the shelter environment," Curtain says. "They're overwhelmed, and all dogs that stay in shelters for a lengthy time start having stress issues."

It's part of the reason that across the nation, Chihuahuas have a high euthanasia rate in shelters.

With the proper training and home environment, though, Chihuahuas can make excellent pets. According to the American Kennel Club, they are cheerful and intelligent dogs, with terrier-like qualities. It's just important to remember that despite their tiny size, Chihuahuas come with all the responsibilities and expenses of a larger dog.

WAG provides low-cost spay and neuter surgeries for pets in Lane County, where surgeries can run between $200 to $400 at regular clinics, Curtain says. SPOT raises funds to help pet owners subsidize the cost of surgery.

To learn more about this this program, call 541-607-4900 or visit spotspayneuter.org. SPOT will also have a booth at the Whiteaker Block party on Aug. 6.

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