

THE PETS

ISSUE

What are “pets,” anyway?

Humans have kept animals around for just about as long as we’ve been human. Dogs helped us hunt. Cats guarded the granaries.

But the notion of having animals strictly as companions, as opposed to four-legged workers, wasn’t too common until an economic middle class — that stratum between the 1 percent and the serfs — came into its own in the 19th century. That meant a lot of people had the resources to own and take care of animals that weren’t, strictly speaking, useful.

And with the middle class came the idea of pets: Animals with names and individual personalities. Animals we care about for other than utilitarian reasons.

In this year’s Pets issue we look at two unusual animal shelters. We visit with a sweet, “unadoptable” pit bull who lives in yet another animal shelter, and we check in on a loose organization of husky owners in Eugene.

Oh, yes, and of course we have the best readers’ pet photos!

Enjoy. — *Bob Keefer*

OUT TO PASTURE

Oregon Horse Rescue strives to give unwanted horses a forever home

BY BOB KEEFER

Humans, if we’re very lucky, get to retire in some comfort. Horses — some of humankind’s closest companions for thousands of years — have to be extremely fortunate to be cared for past their productive years.

On 70 rolling acres a little west of Eugene, a former Eugene city councilor and his wife have spent the past five years, with the help of a small army of paid staffers, volunteers and donors, providing what amounts to a retirement home for dozens of lucky horses who might otherwise have been put down.

We’re talking blind horses, horses with cancer, horses who limp, horses whose age is so advanced that it’s become a chore to care for them. Oregon Horse Rescue takes them in and literally puts them out to pasture.

“What it comes down to is, what’s the horse’s quality of life?” explains David Kelly, who founded Oregon Horse Rescue with his wife, Jane, five years ago. “If the horse can continue to roam the pasture and enjoy life for another year or two, they can do that here.”

Kelly, who served on the City Council for eight years, has always been “an animal guy,” he explains during an afternoon visit to OHR’s facility, which consists largely of rolling pastureland, all neatly fenced and cross-fenced, with four well-tended barns.

We strolled down a long gravel road that runs along the spine of OHR’s pastureland. Every 100 feet or so Kelly would stop and talk to another horse. In a barn we checked in on Honeybun, a blind miniature appaloosa mare who came to the fence to be petted. She lives with Bella, a blind Arabian mare.

He and his wife, Jane Kelly, had talked since they met three decades ago about “doing something” for animals. They picked horses because Jane had ridden competitively and knows the animals, and because there was a strong local need, he says.

“There is a huge problem in this area of horses who are



DAVID KELLY AND A ONE-EYED HORSE

neglected, flat-out abandoned or in some cases abused,” he says.

“People don’t realize it’s a lot more to take care of than a big dog. The horse gets an injury, or the horse is too old to ride. Owners age, and they can no longer live on rural property. Or owners die. There is a huge need for folks who can and will care responsibly for horses that others won’t.”

The word “rescue” suggests an intervention site that provides temporary housing on the way to adoption. But most — as many of two-thirds — of the horses at OHR won’t be going to other homes. “They are elderly or blind or have a chronic medical condition that needs treatment,” David Kelly says.

The Kellys set up Oregon Horse Rescue as a nonprofit

corporation. It rents the land from them — the Kellys bought the property themselves and live there.

Taking care of all those horses requires money. OHR expenses for a year added up to \$273,000, according to the corporation’s 2015 tax filing. Last year, Kelly said, expenses included about \$65,000 for feed and more than \$70,000 in veterinarian bills.

Fundraising being the challenge that it is, Kelly says he and his wife have contributed nearly \$1 million of their own money to the organization in the past five years.

The rewards, though, are simple. “A horse that comes to us skin and bones and afraid of his own shadow, several months down the line seems to have a smile on his face, strolling around the pasture,” Kelly says. “Life is good!” ■