



Sarah Forsythe / Banner-Press photo

Washington County Animal Friends veterinary technician Kaitlynn Murphy settles Atticus, a collie, into a recovery kennel to be monitored post-op as he wakes from sedation on Wednesday. Murphy, along with her peers, keep a watchful eye on the patients as they recover from different operations.

Being a friend to animals – and more

County organization helps dogs, cats and their people

By **Melanie Chrismer**

Banner-Press Correspondent

Area residents who have a dog or cat already may know about Animal Friends of Washington County. If they don't, they should.

Animal Friends of Washington County (AFOWC) is a nonprofit organization focusing on the well-being of dogs and cats. The organization's pet clinic provides affordable spay and neuter surgeries, as well as general preventative medications for fleas, ticks and heartworm. It also has an online pharmacy and a multi-area dog park open to the public.

The organization got started in 2006 when Angela and Bob Knauss had an

idea. They saw there was a need, created the name and worked to fill that need.

"Their brainstorm to create this nonprofit [facility] to support dogs and cats in the Brenham area was the beginning," said Paula Cizik, Animal Friends of Washington County board president.

It since has grown into a facility that provides low-cost services to 15 surrounding counties.

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The lack of affordable services to the area within the territory bounded by Austin, Corpus Christi, Houston and Waco led to the development of a facility run by dedicated volunteers with kind human hearts working to solve the problem of strays and unhealthy pet care, Cizik said.

Past president and current treasurer Bob Davis said the facility's functional design is to "get people with limited resources to take care of their animals."

"We offer such great service (and) low prices, and they can enjoy the dog parks while they are here," Cizik said.

The general consensus is the organization is good for all — animals, people and the community, she said.

The organization's mission called for a plan to fill the need for the services the non-profit now provides. A budget was set and the funds were raised to build the clinic.

According to the organization's official history and mission statement, it is "committed to aid in the prevention of animal overpopulation; protect with loving care those animals that are abused or abandoned; and provide an environment where people can enjoy their furry friends."

This organization began "so people can afford or take care of their pets. That's what is most important to us," Cizik said.

In 2008, the clinic was built on 42.5 acres of land purchased two years prior. The project progressed in phases. Phase One was to create a functioning facility that oriented to animals and their care with all the necessary infrastructure to maintain the area, including an access road and parking space. Phase Two was developing dog parks on the land (one for large dogs 30 pounds and heavier and one for smaller dogs). The parks would include dog pools or ponds and an agility park.

And that is what the organization now has. The result, Davis said, was highly successful.

AFOWC has "the best dog parks within 100 miles," he said, adding running successful dog parks is more expensive than running a golf course.

And, the staff and volunteers work together to make the facility the best it can be.

Andrew Ybarra heads the dog park committee.

"I love the dog park," he said, adding he has been on the AFOWC board for about a year.

He said he moved from Cedar Park and fell in love with the dog park.

"It's not just for dogs. People socialize here, too," he said.

He also said he thinks people get the most benefit.

There are maintenance people for each part of the facility. They have staging areas for the animals, including pre-surgery, surgery and post-op. There is a laundry room, a break room for the staff, offices and two lobbies.

Since 2008, more than 45,900 animals have been spayed or neutered at the facility. In one week, the clinic

may see more than 100 animals and it is able to manage up to 30 pet patients per day. There may be as many as 75-80 surgeries a week and up to 3,500 surgeries a year."

If not kept in check, dog and cat populations can explode, Cizik said, adding AFOWC continues to be dedicated to "keeping pets out of the shelter."

There is a "terrible dog and cat problem," said Harry Stoorza, retired Southern Baptist pastor and long-time AFOWC board member. "The bottom line, dog and cat owners need to take responsibility."

And AFOWC helps make that happen, he said.

It was emphasized the facility is not for injured or sick dogs and cats. It is not a veterinary hospital, an emergency pet hospital or an animal shelter. AFOWC fills the need for preventative, compassionate and necessary care.

For the team, it is a calling rather than a career.

The low-cost pet clinic offers vaccinations, laboratory testing, wellness services and basic health care for animals. Some surgical procedures are performed as well, including spaying, neutering and dental care.

"We are a bridge for people who can't afford the normal care and service for their pets," Stoorza said.

Volunteers are vital to the organization as they help with the business side of things, including handling invoices and other paperwork.

Since 2008, AFOWC has grown and established itself as not only a helpful non-profit organization for the citizens and pets of the community, but also a great place to socialize with a pet and other pet owners.

"I've met people who come to the dog park regularly, just like some go to a coffee shop," Stoorza said, adding that animal lovers oftentimes come together with a common purpose. "Dogs adopt us," he said.

The Knausses have relocated to Michigan, but their Washington County dream is continuing and well supported by the community.

AFOWC has "made their goal every year" as far as funding, Davis said.

And what started as a hope to assist the animal friends in the six counties around Brenham and Washington County has grown to cover Austin, Brazos, Burleson, Colorado, Fayette, Grimes, Lee, Leon, Madison, Matagorda, Milam, Robertson, Waller, and Wharton counties.

The services are for everyone who is in need, Ybarra said.

Animal Friends of Washington County is located at 3901 Highway 36 North in Brenham. The facility is open from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Friday. The dog park is open from 7 a.m. to dusk Tuesday through Sunday.

It always is looking for volunteers and donations.

Anyone who would like additional information may visit www.afvet.org or follow the organization on Instagram @animalfriendsofwashingtoco. The phone number is 979-277-0400.