Halloween Parade Steps Off on Oct. 23

Denim Do-gooders Help Put Zip on Homelessness

“Sheltering Animals & Families Together”
“Sheltering Animals & Families Together”

Initiative promotes domestic violence shelters that accept pets.

By Donna Manz
The Connection

Did you know that approximately 2.3 million people, primarily women, are victims of partner violence? Did you know that over 62 percent of the American households have, at least, one pet? Approximately 48 percent of abused women do not leave an abusive situation because they will not leave their pets behind.

Pets are likely to be victimized by the household abuser. The abuser’s animal cruelty is used to force compliance from the victims. “What I do to the dog is what I can do to you” is the message the abuser sends, according to Allie Phillips, founder of Sheltering Animals & Families Together (SAF-T).

“As a prosecutor in Michigan, I saw women who stayed with their abusers to protect their pets,” said Phillips. “If they leave, the abuser will turn his anger on the pet. The pet usually is the primary target used by the abuser to control the victim.”

“I created the safety program to help get these women out of their abusive homes.”

For other abused women, family pets are unconditional love, security and “home.” And here’s the tragedy: most domestic violence shelters do not allow pets. But people like Allie Phillips, whose goal is to get abused women and their pets out of abusive homes, are trying to change that. Phillips’ goal: to have in-place at least one shelter in each state and the District of Columbia. As of now, the only domestic violence shelter serving the Commonwealth of Virginia and Washington, D.C. that allows victims’ pets is one in Arlington that opened in 2009.

Allie Phillips spoke to the Vienna Woman’s Club on her initiative to promote pet-friendly domestic violence shelters throughout the U.S. With Phillips are VWC President Diane Abel (left) and Education Committee Co-Chair Jo-Lynn Westlund.

Sheltering Animals & Families Together [SAF-T], said that approximately 48 percent of abused women do not leave an abusive situation because they will not leave their pets to the hands of the abuser.

Creating a Pet-Friendly Domestic Violence Shelter

◆ Partner with an animal rescue organization for guidance on building structures and care of pets. The Arlington family/pet shelter partners with the Animal Welfare League of Arlington.

◆ Have a veterinarian on-call to provide treatment and wellness exams. Many animal hospitals will donate their services or offer them at reduced rates.

◆ Let families care for their own pets. It gives the families a sense of usefulness and normalcy.

Phillips spoke at the Oct. 16 meeting of the Vienna Woman’s Club, a community organization which has supported homeless female veterans, veterans and first-responders and the role of pets in PTSD therapy, and homeless teens, all of whom have ties to Fairfax County. More than 30 VWC members turned out to hear Phillips speak and to make donations to the shelter.

The Vienna Woman’s Club collected much-needed items for the Arlington domestic violence/pet shelter, including pet supplies, and made a monetary contribution to the shelter. The unidentifed Arlington shelter is in the process of weatherizing its outdoor pet facility.

When still a prosecuting attorney, Phillips founded Sheltering Animals & Families Together (SAF-T) in the mid-1990s, the first and only global initiative helping domestic violence shelters to welcome families with pets. She is the director of the National Center for Prosecution of Animal Abuse and deputy director with the National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse, programs of the National District Attorney’s Association. Phillips lives in Alexandria.

In 2008, Phillips published the first set of guidelines when there were only four known shelters in the U.S. accepting pets. Now there are approximately 80 shelters.

See Saving Pets, Page 9

Donna Manz
Saving Pets from Abuse

From Page 3

Phillips trains on this initiative throughout the country, promoting the value of family-and-pet shelters. When a young child witnesses pet abuse, that child is eight times more likely to become an offender himself. And consider, then, that 76 percent of kids in abusive households witness pet abuse.

Phillips is licensed to practice law in Michigan and Maryland and has been training prosecutors and criminal justice professionals since 1997. As an assistant prosecutor in Michigan, Phillips handled domestic abuse cases, witnessing the relationships between the abused and family pets.

She was the vice president of Public Policy and then vice president of Human-Animal Strategic Initiatives for American Humane Association.

To learn more about creating a pet-welcomed/domestic violence shelter in your community, go to www.animalsandfamilies.org for more information. Talk with your local service club about sponsorships.

“As a prosecutor in Michigan, I saw women who stayed with their abusers to protect their pets ... If they leave, the abuser will turn his anger on the pet. The pet usually is the primary target used to control the victim.”

—Allie Phillips, founder, Sheltering Animals & Families Together (SAF-T)

MORE SHOWS ADDED
Under the White Big Top on the Plateau at National Harbor • 1.866.999.8111 • cavalia.net