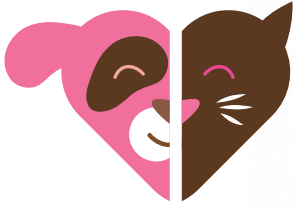


Animal LOVERS



By Toni Garrard Clay



FRIENDS OF THE ANIMALS AT CEDAR CREEK LAKE PERFORMS AN INVALUABLE SERVICE

Almost 31,000.

That's the number of surgeries performed over the past 12 years at Friends of the Animals Low-Cost Spay/Neuter Clinic at Cedar Creek Lake. Over the course of several years, that translates into the prevention of not just millions but, potentially, billions of feline and canine offspring in a population area.

"A male and female cat, unneutered, can have four or five litters a year. Each of those litters unneutered and reproducing at the same rate translates into a horribly, extraordinarily large number," said Clinic Director Sydney Busch.

For many years, Sydney and her husband, Ed, were Dallas residents who spent their weekends on Cedar Creek Lake. The pair were heavily involved with the SPCA of Texas in Dallas, and when they moved to the lake area full time, they quickly identified the stray dog and cat population as a problem.

"We thought about opening up a shelter at first," said Sydney. "But the director of the SPCA in Dallas gave us some wonderful advice. He said, 'If you want to save lives, open a spay and neuter clinic.'"

The Busches, along with their friend Sandy Ward (who owned The Bluebonnet Emporium in Gun Barrel City) worked for the next year and a half to find volunteers, the right property and to raise funds to purchase supplies and equipment. One of the last pieces to fall into place was the veterinarian.

"There are not many veterinarians who are right for this type of work," explained Sydney. "It's very

repetitive, so it's fairly boring, and you need to be fast. Most veterinarians either cannot or do not want to do it."

After looking for some time for the right person, Ed decided to search on the Texas A&M veterinary website. There he found an ad placed by a vet in Dallas looking to work one day a week at a spay and neuter clinic in the area. That man was Dr. Glen Campbell, and he was perfect for the job.

"He's the heart and soul of our whole organization," said Sydney. "He's very good; he's very fast, and he's also compassionate. He cares about the animals and the volunteers."

Dr. Campbell performs 50 to 60 surgeries each Tuesday — the one day a week that the clinic is open. "To give you an idea of how good he is, we once had a veterinarian fill in for Dr. Campbell. After four surgeries, he was exhausted," said Sydney.

Friends of the Animals has a handful of paid employees. In addition to Sydney and Dr. Campbell, there are two vet techs and others who handle necessary duties such as data entry, scheduling and surgical equipment care. In addition to those individuals, 30 to 40 volunteers give their time at the clinic every Tuesday, from a few hours to all day.

The services provided are limited to the most critical. Friends of the Animals spays and neuters cats and dogs by appointment (larger dogs may book as much as a month out) and provide low-



cost vaccinations without appointment from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. every Tuesday. Spay and neutering for dogs ranges from \$35 (small male dogs) to \$65 (very large female dogs). For cats, it's \$25 for males and \$35 for females. Rabies-only vaccinations are \$10, and complete annual vaccinations are \$15. A refundable surcharge of \$5 is added for unneutered animals receiving shots. Dogs can also get tested for heartworms for \$15.

"We're certainly not trying to take business away from veterinarians in the area," said Sydney. "But there are a lot of people who do not have the money for even an office visit to get a shot. So we provide that service to the community. We never turn anyone away who can't afford basic care for their pet."

Thanks to both a grant and other fundraising efforts, assistance is available, if needed, for surgery costs for cats and for dogs 25 pounds and up. "Larger dogs produce the biggest litters and are the most unwanted in shelters," explained Sydney. "Smaller dogs are the most adopted and produce the smallest litters. So we use our limited funds where they are most needed."

The care provided at the clinic is beyond what one might expect from a low-cost spay and neuter facility. After a cat has surgery, its ears are cleaned and, if needed, treated for ear mites. It will also be checked thoroughly for any wounds and treated as needed. "For most of the cats, it's the only time they get any care," said Sydney.

A team of volunteers regularly traps stray and feral cats and delivers them to the clinic to have them neutered (sometimes with financial assistance from

the limited feral cat fund) before they are once again released. Dogs, while they are still under the effects of anesthesia, have their nails trimmed.

"Our volunteers are absolutely amazing," said Sydney. "They love to be there, or they wouldn't come back. They feel they are really making a difference."

Sydney feels the same way. Friends of the Animals, now double the size it was when it opened, is truly a labor of love.

"I'm at the clinic several times a week, not just on Tuesdays," she said. "And every single time I walk in there, I get a feeling of satisfaction at what we've done for the community, for animals, for these families. It's huge."

To schedule an appointment or find out how you can become a volunteer, call 903-887-7387(PETS). A list of services and appointment instructions are available at friendsoftheanimals.org. The clinic is located at 122 Old Gun Barrel Lane in Gun Barrel City.

