

LIVING FREE ANIMAL SANCTUARY

Saving humanity, one animal at a time



Photo by John Pacheco

Since 1980, Living Free Animal Sanctuary has been saving the lives of animals that would otherwise be euthanized in shelters. The Sanctuary's Founder, Emily Jo Beard, believed in reverence for all life, and was on the vanguard of the No-Kill movement. Emily's commitment, example and hard work - along with that of many others - has slowly turned the tide, and now the possibility of turning the US into a no-kill nation is well within reach.

Randall Harris, the Sanctuary's President, and the dedicated staff and volunteers are committed to seeing Emily's vision realized. He says, "We could not ask for a better team of staff and volunteers. Our adoptions and rescues have increased

350% since 2013, and our low cost public spay/ neuter clinics are treating over 600 animals a year - all of which has substantially increased workloads and pressure - and yet there's never a word of complaint. Despite the hardships, saving these lives and reducing suffering has its own rewards. But without a doubt, the dedication and positive, can-do attitude of our team have made these advances possible. They have a tougher job than people realize, and I just cannot say enough about them."

One of the toughest parts of the job is the rescue work itself. Harris says, "Sharon (Caughron) and Edgar (Santiago) conduct most of the shelter rescues. While it's very gratifying

to see a rescued animal that otherwise would not have made it finally going home - looking into the eyes of an animal that they cannot save is... well, you can imagine." That's one major reason why the Sanctuary has created the "Almost Home 2020" Initiative, which is blueprint for all shelters to become no-kill by 2020.

"The people working at public shelters have an extremely difficult job, with challenges very few understand. There may be exceptions, but those at the shelters we rescue from have great compassion and would love to see things change," says Harris. In researching animal welfare as part of the Sanctuary's reorganization, Harris was struck by several things. "First, our biggest challenge isn't overcoming ignorance - it's overcoming the erroneous preexisting beliefs that the problem is too overwhelming to solve, and the best we can hope is that it's "managed humanely." This is simply not true."

For example, many people believe that the number of unwanted animals is so overwhelming that there are not enough homes for all of them. But the reality is that there are about *five* homes available for every healthy, adoptable animal that will die in a shelter this year. Harris says, "The number estimates vary, but conservatively, about 25 million families will be in the market for a new pet this year. About 3.5 million will adopt from a rescue or shelter. That leaves about 20 million homes for the approximately 4 million animals that will needlessly die in shelters. When people realize that their decisions can make a difference, they make different decisions."

Another broader issue is that, in Harris' view, "Compassion is not enough." There are about 13,500 registered non-profit animal rescue organizations, and about 3500 bricks and mortar shelters. "That's a lot of resources. And a lot of compassion. So why haven't we been more effective in solving this?" Harris believes that many groups don't apply customary business principles, to their detriment and the detriment of the animals. "Here's an example - everyone's heard someone say, "I'd love to get a rescue, but I just can't go to the public shelter. They're so horrible and depressing." And they're right. Many of them are. The question is - even after mounds of data of what in business would be termed "negative client experience" which would be an extremely high priority for most businesses to address - why continue to build shelters the same sterile, harsh, loud, and uninviting way? I mean, with a little thought and creativity, it would really cost no more to build something inviting, comfortable and warm as it does to build a prison like facility. Yet until fairly recently that didn't happen. Imagine if Cartier set up shop at a back counter of a Jiffy Lube. It would certainly save money over Rodeo Drive rent, but I have a feeling their revenues and margins would suffer. In business to consumer (B2C), which is what we are, positive client experience is critical. Ignoring such a simple principle ultimately cost millions of animals their lives."



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The Sanctuary's goal is to create the best "client experience" possible for all, including the animals, visitors, adopters, volunteers, donors, supporters and staff. "We owe this to the animals - to do our best for them. We welcome visitors and we want to share this beautiful Sanctuary and our work with the community."

The Sanctuary is deeply invested in the human-animal connection. "In animal welfare, you come across story after story of how a Rescued animal actually wound up "rescuing" their human adopter. We even changed our tag line (to "Saving humanity one animal at a time") to reflect this."

The Sanctuary currently offers a Pets for Patriots program to help place companion and therapy animals with disabled Veterans, and is developing joint initiatives such as the Wild Mustang Rescue with an equine therapy program for Veterans suffering from PTSD. Harris says, "Our partner in this is WIND (Wild in North Dakota). Eileen Norton is a PATH trained

therapist, and her husband Bill Schlichter is a former Top Gun pilot (who actually did the flying in the film.) Both are strong mustang advocates with three rescued horses of their own, and are obviously very concerned for our Veterans. With their partnership, our Sanctuary will one day become a refuge for healing traumatized wild mustangs and Veterans suffering from PTSD and other disabilities. Mustangs are particularly adept as therapeutic animals due to their compassion, heightened sensitivity and innate hypervigilance - characteristics many Veterans recognize in themselves. In short - We save the horses, so the horses can 'save' the Veteran. Some stories (of healing) are nothing short of miraculous."

The Sanctuary is also revising and expanding Education and Outreach Initiatives, designing programs from pre-K to post graduate education levels.

In 2014, the Sanctuary began a major reorganization and began to explore ways to expand its vision and reach its greatest life-saving potential. One priority was to build stronger partnerships with other rescue groups, and

provide more in the way of community services. In addition to working with public shelters on Rescues, the Sanctuary also collaborates on local rescues with Animal Rescue Friends of Idyllwild (ARF); with Luke's Legacy, to provide low-cost public spay/ neuter clinics; with Dr. Lindsay Crowley to provide emergency rattlesnake antivenin for companion animals bitten on the Hill; with Best Friends Animal Society in several areas; and with Helen Woodward Animal Center to transport animals from high-kill areas to high adoption areas.

Harris concludes, "Humans created the problem, and humans can fix it. We're actually fairly close. We have to change false underlying beliefs and counterintuitive systems and incentives that drive the status quo. It's going to take effort, but it can be done. Advocates like Emily blazed the trail, and as a society we've actually made great progress toward no-kill - and now's the time to see the vision through. Every choice matters. We owe it to the animals to do the best we can."



Top R: Lilo Finds a Forever Home; Bottom R: President Randall Harris at Wild In North Dakota with Rescue Charlie; Bottom L: Zander's Forever Family; (Photos Courtesy of Living Free); Middle: This Chihuahua Pup has lofty ambitions; Top R, This Cool Cat needs a forever home; (Photos by John Pacheco)