

YOU AND YOUR PET

New UCHS manager challenged by the constant need for funding

LISA TALLYN
Staff Writer

Erika Longman loves her job. The Hillsburgh woman, who took over in January as manager of the Upper Credit Humane Society (UCHS), is eager to get to work every day.

"It's not work, the days just fly by," says Longman, an animal lover. "There are surprises every day, but I knew to expect surprises."

Longman, formerly an animal control officer with the UCHS, says the biggest challenge she faces in her new role is finding sufficient money to fund the shelter's annual operations. The bulk of that money comes from donations, as grants of any kind are hard to come by, she says.

"Most grantors tend to like children's charities and education," says Longman. "We kind of just live hand to mouth."

As only an affiliate of the Ontario Society of Prevention of Cruelty toward Animals (OSPCA) Longman stresses they do not receive any funding from the organization, something she believes many people may not be aware of.

On top of the daily costs of running the UCHS, which serves a large area including Halton Hills and Erin, there are extra costs that arise throughout the year, often for medical bills for the animals. For example, UCHS recently faced an \$800 veterinary bill for a calico cat named Genevieve who required eye surgery after a pellet went in her eye. The surgery was a success, Genevieve's eye was saved and her vision retained. But the cost of the surgery, which is actually only half of the true cost since the veterinarian covered the rest of the bill from a fund he has for animals with special needs, put a huge strain on the UCHS's budget— and Genevieve is not the only animal there with costly medical needs.

"We have a number of animals in need of expensive dental surgery," says Longman.

Currently she says UCHS is also struggling with a leaky roof that will need to be repaired. So any extra money they receive she says could be put toward that as well.

A recently launched steady fundraiser for UCHS is the Georgetown Thrift Shop, which officially opened in February in the Moore Park Plaza. The store features home fashion items,

books, and children's items. All the money raised from sales in the shop goes to the UCHS. Longman is grateful for all the support they receive— both in monetary form and in time.

"They (the animal lovers who support them) are an incredibly dedicated bunch. If it weren't for our volunteers and supporters we wouldn't be here."

Longman says many volunteers have been with the UCHS since day one.

"It's an emotionally draining place to be. People don't always stay for the long term." But she says they appreciate any time people can give and always need more volunteers. "Whatever they want to do, we can find something for them. Whatever they can give us, we're grateful for."

She says the UCHS currently has approximately 35 volunteers who do a variety of different jobs.

"The majority like to work hands-on with the animals either with dog walking or they come in and brush the cats. We do have some who help out with fundraising."

Each year the UCHS adopts out approximately 500 animals— most of them cats and dogs. She estimates the ratio is 25 cats to approximately 10 dogs and the average length of stay for animals in their care is two to three weeks, but some do stay longer.

"Older cats are often an issue and black cats tend to be a little harder to place. People are most often looking for puppies and small dogs, which are very rare to pass through the doors here."

Adoption fees are \$135 for cats and \$226 for dogs, which includes vaccines, micro-chipping and spaying or neutering. Along with domestic animals, Longman says UCHS also takes in sick or injured wildlife.

"We do now have a wildlife expert who volunteers with us," she says. With his expertise they hope to be able to provide a lot of advice about wildlife over the phone as opposed to going out



Tucker and Longman

and picking up wild animals. Longman estimates 99 per cent of the time

with wild animals people think they have been abandoned when in actuality they have not.

"Wildlife is best left in its natural habitat, its odds of survival are much higher," says Longman.

Longman is currently working with her dog Tucker, who came to UCHS after being picked up as a stray wandering along Steeles Ave. when he was just a puppy. She had fostered Tucker at her home and was sad when he was adopted. When he was turned back into the shelter again, Longman took it as a sign that he was hers. Her goal is to have Tucker act as a sort of "spokes-dog" for the humane society and future plans include eventually utilizing him in an education program she would like to launch.

Upper Credit Humane Society Shelter is located at the corner of Trafalgar Rd. North and Wellington Rd. 24. Its phone number is 519-833-2287, and web address, www.uppercredit.com.

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