



Kennel Connection

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Vol. 5 Issue 2

Newsletter of Frederick County Animal Control & Pet Adoption Center

Spring/Summer 2020

Bently, a handsome young pit bull mix, arrived at Frederick County Animal Control in October 2019 when his previous owner determined that they could not take him along when they moved. Bently immediately impressed shelter staff with his temperament—kisses and hugs for every human and a friendly wag for every dog.

But staff also noticed that the young dog moved carefully, head cocked consistently to one side. His eyes had a “vacant” look. Because Bently’s previous owner had never taken him to a veterinarian, no medical records were available. An exam by shelter vet Dr. Sharon Thomas confirmed that Bently was blind in his right eye and—aside from limited peripheral vision—was also almost completely blind in his left eye.

When he was placed for adoption, Bently was housed right on the corner—the first dog you see as you enter FCAC’s dog adoption floor. As one of the only dogs who sat quietly in his kennel, Bently caught the eye



of many visitors. He often seemed to be listening carefully to catch the sound of a familiar voice.

Staff and volunteers found that Bently got around quite well despite his vision impairment. Those walking him learned that it was easy to help him avoid obstacles. He participated in shelter dog pack walks, quickly demonstrating his love of other dogs. A regular at events, Bently happily met Santa Claus, greeted and played with dogs of all shapes and sizes, charmed every person he met, and even hung out with horses at an equestrian event.

No one could understand why Bently wasn’t snapped up immediately. In December, he was still waiting. That month, FCAC launched our first Home for the Holidays short-term foster care program. The goals were to give pets a break from the shelter, give people interested in fostering a

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She Had Me at Hiss

By Bette Brown

Sibling kittens Modge and Podge were brought to Frederick County Animal Control in late October 2019, after being trapped on a property. For their first few months in the shelter, Modge and Podge were assigned to FCAC’s Fraidy Cat program, through which they received attention from the most experienced cat volunteers—those who have a solid understanding of feline body language.

When FCAC was approved as a Cat Pawsitive shelter, my daughter Lindsey and I signed up. We’d learned a lot about dog training and saw cat training as a welcome challenge. One of our first cats was shy boy Podge. While we taught him to rub his head against our hands on cue, his sister Modge hid nearby, looking for all the world like she hoped that if she didn’t look at us, we wouldn’t notice her.

After Podge and another of our trainees were adopted, we turned to Modge. If Podge was shy, Modge was, in the presence of humans, nearly

immobilized with fear. We knew that Modge needed to progress in baby steps, so we started by teaching her to make eye contact on cue. She was too scared to even notice a typical cat treat and using play as a reward was out of the question—she would have had to move. But we found that she could not resist chicken baby food, so that became her training reward. Soon, Modge was making eye contact even without the cue and, seeming to gain confidence, began spending more time at the front of her cage.

By the time COVID-19 hit, we had also taught Modge to touch a target stick with her nose and to give us a high five. Of course, for the high five, Modge needed to hide her face behind the partition in her cage.

Meanwhile, volunteer Hilary Hand-Murphy had been getting to know Modge since the kitty’s first weeks in the shelter. “I mainly try to work with the shy cats and the sassy cats at the shelter,” says Hilary. “They get less attention, have longer shelter stays, and need more social-



ization and TLC.” Because she has volunteered at FCAC for several years, Hilary has enough experience and knowledge to participate in both the Fraidy Cat and Cat Pawsitive programs.

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Director's Letter: Plan Ahead Now

By Linda Shea

On a daily basis, the Frederick County Division of Animal Control and Pet Adoption Center offers support and resources for pet owners in our county. Our pet food bank typically assists those experiencing financial hardship—participants include senior citizens, disabled adults, those who are underemployed, or those receiving some type of government assistance. During the COVID-19 pandemic, and thanks to the generosity of the community, we were able to waive the financial need restrictions and provide pet food to any County resident in need.

We are a safe place for stray animals and a last resort for pet owners who can no longer keep their pets. We remain aware of community challenges and strive to respond in a well-organized and compassionate manner.

Regardless of what is going on in the community, or in the world, our message remains consistent regarding responsible pet ownership: Owning a pet, at any point in your life or your pet's life, requires some planning—financial and otherwise. In addition to routine food and vet visits, you should consider saving funds for unexpected veterinary needs, a boarding emergency, or lack of income. Planning ahead certainly reduces stressors involved when any unexpected situation arises.

COVID-19 is an unwanted reminder of the importance of planning ahead for your pets' welfare. Sgt. Dave Luckenbaugh, animal control officer supervisor, says, "If you are an animal owner, the time to make an emergency plan for your pets is now. Have a list of family members, friends, neighbors, or a local boarding facility to safely care for you pets if you are not able. Keep veterinary records and medical information readily accessible along with a supply of food and medications."

Planning ahead will save heartache for you, your family, and the pets in your life. That planning should start now.

■ Linda Shea is Director, Frederick County Animal Control.

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When COVID-19 caused FCAC to close to the public—including volunteers—Hilary let shelter staff know that she was available to foster if needed. Hilary and her husband Shawn had a sweet, talkative 12-year-old tortie named Lizzie. But they had recently lost their 10-year-old cat Mokie, whom they had adopted from FCAC in January 2019, to cancer. "Although we only had Mokie in our lives for a short period of time," says Hilary, "he brought such joy to us every single day and we miss him so much! The loss of Mokie created a void in our household that we were eager to fill after the grieving process ended."

Shelter staff asked Hilary to foster Modge to see how the scared kitty would do in a home environment. Hilary agreed. "I had worked a lot with Modge as part of the Fraidy Cat program so she was comfortable with me." And, as a Cat Pawsitive trainer, Hilary would be able to continue training Modge at home.

To help Modge adjust, Hilary and Shawn set her up in a bathroom with everything she needed: food, water, litter box, lots of toys, and a place to hide. At first, says



Hilary & Molly

Hilary, "there was lots of hissing and she spent the majority of her time in her carrier, where she felt safe." But over time, with lots of visits and cuddles by her foster parents, Modge started to warm up. "Each day," continues Hilary, "Modge got braver and showed us that she loves to be picked up, loves to play, and loves attention." In fact, Modge turned out to be a lap cat.

Eventually, Modge was ready to explore the rest of her foster home. Every few days, Modge and Lizzie interacted for a few minutes at a time. To maximize the chances of a successful introduction, Hilary and Shawn waited until Day 14 before allowing the two kitties to freely interact. "Modge absolutely adored Lizzie immediately and wanted to be with her constantly," explains Hilary. "Lizzie, on the other hand, was a little hesitant with Modge at first. There was some hissing and growling on Lizzie's part. But eventually, Lizzie's curiosity of Modge won out and she warmed up to her a few days later."

After watching Modge blossom for a few weeks, Hilary and Shawn acknowledged that the young cat had stolen their hearts. "As my



Lizzie & Molly

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Our Mission: To prevent cruelty, abuse, and neglect of animals in Frederick County by enforcing all state, county, and city ordinances to the fullest extent possible. We will shelter homeless animals and attempt to place them in safe and loving home environments. We will educate the public on all animal issues to foster a more aware and caring community.

Frederick County Animal Control & Pet Adoption Center

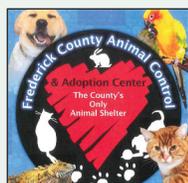
1832 Rosemont Avenue, Frederick, MD 21702 • 301-600-1546
frederickcountymd.gov/15/Animal-Control

Frederick County Animal Control Supervisory Team

- Linda Shea, *Director*
- SGT Dave Luckenbaugh, *Animal Control Officer Supervisor*
- Shawn Snyder, *Volunteer Coordinator*
- Bethany Davidson, *Humane Educator*
- Brandy Odin, *Kennel Manager*
- Amanda Clarke, *Office Manager*
- Dr. Sharon Thomas, *Shelter Veterinarian*

Newsletter Volunteers

- Bette Stallman Brown, *Editor*
- Mina Forsythe Rempe, *Graphic Designer*



BENTLY

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chance to try it on a short-term basis, and give shelter staff valuable information about how the participating pets behaved in a home.

Denise and Tom Seppala were among those who signed up to foster a dog through the Home for the Holidays program. "We lost our lab Lexy in 2017 after 14 years and hadn't been in a place to add another pet," says Tom. They signed up for the Home for the Holidays program so they could see if they were ready to foster or possibly even adopt.

As an FCAC volunteer, Denise had noticed Bently in his kennel and had always made time to stop and talk to him. So she and Tom were happy to be matched with Bently as their holiday foster dog.

They found that Bently loves to be with his people—a "true cuddle bug" and an overgrown



"lap dog." True, Bently is a special needs dog, but, says Tom, "his vision impairment was not an issue for us and didn't seem to hinder him in any daily activities."

"He went back to FCAC after the holidays and we couldn't stop thinking about him," says Tom. "We made it official and adopted Bently in January."

Bently has fit in very nicely with his new family. A visit to a veterinary ophthalmologist revealed that Bently's vision loss is progressive and cannot be corrected with surgery. They expect him to lose his remaining vision in the next 1 to 3 years. Once pandemic restrictions are eased sufficiently, they plan to bring in a trainer. "We would like to make sure he is confident and comfortable as he loses the little vision he has," explains Tom.

Tom and Denise have also found that Bently has a sleep disorder, which is thought to be

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HOMES WANTED

View all of our adoptable pets on Petfinder (www.frederick.petfinder.com) or Petango (www.petango.com/fcac).
Or stop by for a visit—you never know, you might just find true love!



Toast

A true one-of-a-kind cat, Toast is amazingly affectionate: a lap cat who loves to be picked up. "You can carry her around like a baby for hours," says FCAC humane educator Bethany Davidson. Playful and curious, Toast was thrilled to discover bird videos on YouTube. We suspect that watching the birdies helps her accept her poultry allergy. Toast will insist on being her human's only cat. But with this girl in your life, you won't need another! If you see her in a onesie, it's not a fashion statement, it's because—at least in a shelter environment—she sometimes overgrooms due to stress. Because Toast arrived as a stray, we don't know how her ear was injured; true to her sweet nature, Toast handles regular ear cleaning like a champ. At some point in her life, Toast was declawed on all four feet, necessitating a soft litter. In our opinion, Toast's purrsonality more than compensates for her minor medical needs.



Batman

This young, friendly, energetic guy has quite a story to tell, though we only know part of it. More than a year ago, according to vet records, Batman followed some kids home from school "and never left." Though he is "super sweet," according to FCAC staff, Batman has been bounced around from home to home and is now at the Frederick shelter for his second tour. Perhaps owing to his outdoor beginnings, Batman seems to feel that he should be allowed to go outside at any time. For this reason, he will need a home that can either prevent him from escaping—providing plenty of enrichment inside—or provide him with a safe way to experience the great outdoors, such as a catio, secure cat fence, or training to help Batman learn to walk on a harness and leash.



Teddy

Variouly described as a rottie mix ("pocket rottie"?) or terrier mix, this adorable guy weighs in at a portable 26 pounds. Teddy arrived as a stray so we don't know anything about his past. Here at the shelter, this boy, though sweet, is very shy and fearful. Because of his timidity, we feel that Teddy is a flight risk. He will need careful handling—for example, a secure harness and leash, no chance of a door left open, and either leash walks only or a secure 4- to 6-foot privacy fence. He may settle in and lose his fear with time, but Teddy is looking for a family that is committed to his safety for his lifetime.

Helping Adopters Click with Shelter Cats

By *Bethany Davidson*

Click. Click. Click. This noise, which can now be heard on the feline adoption floor at Frederick County Animal Control, is a by-product of an exciting new feline enrichment program called Cat Pawsitive.

A program of The Jackson Galaxy Project, Cat Pawsitive was created in 2016 by Galaxy and a team of animal behavior experts to keep cats mentally and physically active in a shelter or rescue environment. The program uses positive reinforcement clicker training to enrich the day-to-day lives of shelter cats, increase the cats' confidence, build new skills for the feline and human participants, and promote the human-cat bond. The result can improve a cat's adoptability and reduce the duration of the cat's stay at a shelter.

FCAC began implementing the program in January after it was selected to be one of 55 animal welfare organizations across the United States to participate in the 2020 semester of Cat Pawsitive. The 12-week semester introduced a core group of staff and volunteer trainers to the program through online courses on feline body language and the three main methods of training: capturing, targeting, and luring.

So far, nine cats have learned behaviors such as sit, touch, spin, and high five through the



program, but learning new behaviors is just one of the benefits of Cat Pawsitive. "For the cats, they have been afforded extra attention, affection, and socialization through training," says shelter director Linda Shea. "For staff and volunteers, they have built relationships with some of our challenging cats and learned positive ways to encourage good behavior."

Participating cats have made incredible transformations throughout their Cat Pawsitive

journeys. "To see the cats I worked with (some shy, some sassy) embrace the Cat Pawsitive training and show everyone how smart they are was just so great," says Hilary Hand-Murphy, an FCAC volunteer and Cat Pawsitive trainer. By learning new behaviors, shy cats have gone from hiding in the back of their cages to sitting comfortably at the front waiting for visitors. Easily overstimulated and sassy cats, which now have an outlet for their energy, have calmed. "To see these cats truly blossom and get adopted into loving homes was the absolute best feeling ever," continues Hilary.

Of the nine participating cats, eight have been adopted and one was placed with a rescue organization. The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated a pause in the program. However, when FCAC is able to reopen to the public, the core trainers will again ramp up the program, not only by training new cats, but by teaching the training methods to additional volunteers.

"I am so happy to be a member of the Cat Pawsitive team at FCAC," says Hilary, "and I look forward to using the training skills I learned in the program to continue to help more shelter cats in the future."

■ *Bethany Davidson is the humane educator at Frederick County Animal Control.*

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unrelated to his vision loss. He is sometimes active while sleeping, spinning and barking. "We have been working with a neurologist and the good news is that there are no abnormal findings," says Tom. "We have seen some improvement while working with the specialists," adds Denise, "[and] have learned a lot about the different sleep issues that affect dogs."

Otherwise, Bently is no different from any other dog. In addition to snuggling with his humans, Bently



loves to ride in the car and to sit in the sun on the deck. "If there is just a sliver of sun, he will find it," says Tom. He goes on many walks and hikes, with his adventures documented on his very own Facebook page. He loves to eat fruits and vegetables. His current favorite: strawberries.

And, admits Tom, "Bently has a thing for pillows and blankets. It is a love/hate relationship. There are times he is fine and loves to snuggle with them and other times when he wants to wrestle or play tug of war with them."

"He has been a great addition to our family," says Tom. "We look forward to all his new adventures."

HISS

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husband said, 'she had me at hiss,'" says Hilary. They adopted Modge on April 29, 2020.

These days, the once shy kitty, now named Molly, loves to be picked up, loves to play, follows her mom and dad everywhere, and sleeps with them every night. Even Lizzie seems to find Molly's antics amusing.

"Molly's transformation—from shy fraidy kitten to loving, friendly lap cat—has been just amazing to watch," says Hilary. "Molly has helped fill the void left by Mokie. We love her so much and can't imagine not having her in our lives."

■ *Bette Stallman Brown is an FCAC volunteer and president of Frederick Friends of Our County Animal Shelter.*