

Diane K. Webster

Co-Founder and President of Tails of Hope, Inc.

Contributed by Diane K. Webster

When you make plans, God laughs. A graduate of Farrell High School, Tails of Hope, Inc. co-founder and president Diane Webster has always loved children and animals. With a strong desire to make a difference in the community where she was raised, Diane attended the former Slippery Rock State College and majored in elementary education. After graduating as the valedictorian of the class of education, Diane expected to land a job as an elementary teacher, but found no jobs available in the immediate area at that time. The realization led her to switch paths and she attended Gannon and Penn State universities with a concentration in marketing and business.

In 1998, after 14 years in the business world, Diane felt compelled to work for a non-profit and find a way back to her passion for children and people in the community. She joined the American Heart Association where she organized annual gala events and heart walks in four counties. But, after years without the opportunity to work with school children, her favorite part of the job was working with school children in 250 schools, promoting healthy lifestyle choices and supporting "Jump Rope for Heart" fundraisers. "Working for the American Heart Association brought a feeling of excitement and commitment to make strides to save lives," Diane said. "Knowing that I was raising funds to fight the number one killer in the United States made all the hard work and long hours worth it."

After proving successful in fundraising and marketing with the American Heart Association, Diane secured a position at St. Paul's Continuing Care Community in Greenville after her AHA office relocated to Ohio. At St. Paul's, Diane orchestrated fundraising campaigns and raised more than \$3 million to further enhance the residents' lifestyles. While the difference she was making in other people's lives brought her immense joy and pride, it was also during this chapter of her life that Diane faced a series of three devastating personal losses which she calls "the lowest point of my life." Within a three-week period, Diane's mother, Helen Deter, and her husband, Thomas O'Brien, passed away. As if that wasn't enough, her beloved poodle, Obie, also passed right before her husband. The residents and co-workers at St. Paul's, with whom Diane created special relationships, were there for her during the difficult time. "They showered me with love, compassion and sympathy to help me deal with three very deep losses. It felt as if they had an umbrella over my head sheltering me from a torrential storm," Diane recalled.



from top: Diane Webster with her miniature poodle, Lilly; Tails of Hope, Inc., located in the Thomas M. O'Brien Animal Care Center, received a \$200 donation from Emily O'Brien (great niece of Diane and the late Thomas O'Brien), along with her friend Teagan Bell. The girls held a letter writing fundraiser for Christmas. Pictured: Diane, Teagan, Emily and Joyce Hill, Tails of Hope board vice president.

There was also another special somebody who helped her through the pain of loss: her miniature poodle, Lilly. "I never would have imagined that my little poodle, Lilly, would bring me such comfort and love," Diane said. "It was at this point I wished to find a way for every cat and dog to live a healthy lifestyle and to have a loving home. I believe cats and dogs deserve a spoiled life for all the comfort and joy they give us."

In August 2011, two months after her husband's passing, Diane's brother-in-law, Paul O'Brien, approached her with an idea to build a facility in the Shenango Valley that would benefit both animals and the community. During his lifetime, Tom O'Brien

greatly loved and appreciated the joy his beloved pets brought to his life; it would give him great pleasure to know that in his name, animals and families are given an opportunity to share their lives and affection with each other in a meaningful way and that the community is benefitting from the organization. After several years and a successful capital campaign, Tails of Hope, Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, became a reality as Mercer County's only low-cost spay/neuter facility available to all people in the community, rescues and shelters. Tails of Hope, Inc. proudly operates in the Thomas M. O'Brien Animal Care Center in Hermitage.

In every community, in every state, there are homeless animals. In the U.S., there are an estimated six to eight million homeless animals entering animal shelters every year. Communities spend millions of taxpayer dollars each year coping with problems that a failure to spay or neuter causes. The one-time cost of spaying or neutering is far lower than the expense involved in rounding up strays, feeding and housing abandoned animals, and euthanizing those for whom homes cannot be found.

Tails of Hope, Inc. exists to eliminate neglect, abuse and suffering of animals in the community; striving to accomplish this by significantly impacting pet overpopulation through affordable spay/neuter programs for not only the public, but also through partnerships with local rescues and city shelters. In addition to spay/neuter services for cats and dogs, vaccines, boosters, heartworm and flea medications are available to purchase along with microchips to increase the likelihood of return if an animal is lost or stolen.

Tails of Hope, Inc. recently received a grant from The Glenn & Jean Harnett Private Charitable Foundation which allowed it to even further expand its financial assistance for low income households through a sliding scale in the "Spay & Neuter Angel Program." Diane wishes for every animal to have a healthy life in a loving home and for every person or family to receive the love and support a cat or dog gives in return.

2020 brings new challenges for Diane and Tails of Hope, Inc. After three years in operation and providing services to more than 6,500 animals, COVID-19 forced the facility to close for 60 calendar days. It was then closed an additional 28 days due to

Who is your inspiration? The persons I most admired in my life were my parents. I often wondered why they worked so hard and devoted a great deal of their time helping others. They thought of everyone else besides themselves. Family was first, hard work followed, and their devotion to church and the willingness to always help their neighbor regardless of the task was prominent. I know now that by helping others and giving of yourself, you receive a return of not 10 times over, but much greater than that. They taught me that giving is always better than receiving.

What is your favorite memory from this past year? I actually have two! First, I was married in July to a wonderful, kind and giving man in a small intimate ceremony of family and friends. Finding love again and sharing it fills my heart. We ventured on a journey soon after to tour the western U.S.A. which was breathtaking. Second: Tails of Hope, Inc. was recognized at the Shenango Valley Chamber of Commerce's annual Phoenix Awards and was given an award for Non-Profit Organization of the Year. What a humbling honor and experience it was.

What is your favorite quote?

"Dogs are not our whole life, but they make our lives whole." - Roger Caras

What is your favorite way to unwind after a busy day? I can lose myself in my kitchen and de-stress from any situation. Especially around the holidays, I have been known to bake enough cookies to feed to an army. Weather permitting, I love to walk in the woods and listen to the silence of nature.

What do you find the most rewarding in your career? Most challenging? As co-founder and president of the Tails of Hope Board of Directors, I have endured the struggle of starting a non-profit business, but have not done it alone. My fellow board members and volunteers have supported this organization and it is with their help that we have seen success. My passion for Tails of Hope to succeed is immeasurable due to the need we see every day. Never before did I realize that the suffering, abuse and neglect that dogs and cats endure was so prevalent in our neighborhoods. It's time for us to continue to work toward eliminating pet overpopulation to make life better for these furry creatures.

How do you define success? "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. Acknowledge his ways and he will set your path straight," (Proverbs 3:5-6) is a verse by which I try to live my life. When life doesn't perform the way I think it should, I have learned that I am not in control. If we never venture out of our comfort zone, we will never know what we could have accomplished. If we succeed, life is good, if we fail, we become discouraged. Quitting after failure or disappointment is the easy way out. It takes courage and determination to pick yourself up and forge forward no matter what the outcome will be.

changes in staffing and a nationwide veterinarian shortage which left the public, area rescues and city shelters without much needed spay and neuter services. Tails of Hope, Inc. has reached out to full-service veterinary clinics and veterinary professionals in the area with a proposal for a collaborative solution which will benefit their businesses, area rescues, city shelters, citizens and animals. Gary Hinkson, Hermitage city manager, offers his full support: "It is only together, as a community, that we will be able to find solutions, overcome challenges and find continued success. I believe collaborative initiatives between businesses and employers like this one for the veterinary industry will serve to enhance services for people and animals in our community and

to further economic development in our area for everyone by attracting and retaining high-quality professionals."

Tails of Hope, Inc. is grateful for the dedicated employees, volunteers and board of directors who provide their time and talents. "We will continue to persevere through this storm until we are back to functioning at full capacity for our community," said Diane. "Thus far we have veterinary clinic staff for two days per week, and we are actively seeking other veterinarians, registered vet techs and volunteers who are aligned with our mission to supplement the remaining days on a rotating schedule, even if for only one day a month or every other month. If we work together for the greater good, we will prevail."

Howl-n-Purr Grub Club: Community Cat & Dog Food Distribution

The COVID-19 pandemic has made acquiring pet food difficult for many pet parents. In order to help individuals in the area who may be struggling, and thanks to the generous funding from The Glenn & Jean Harnett Family Foundation, Tails of Hope, Inc. will host a no-contact, drive-thru pet food distribution program called the Howl-n-Purr Grub Club. Despite the uncertainty and concern the pandemic has imposed, Tails of Hope, Inc. and its volunteers remain dedicated to helping the people and pets in the community. A total of \$5,000 worth of cat and dog food will be distributed through the program this year.

When: Saturday, August 1, 2020
from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Where: parking lot of the Thomas M. O'Brien Animal Care Center, 2450 Hoezle Road, Hermitage

From the safety of the car, pet parents can pop their trunk and receive one bag of kitten, cat, puppy or dog food (while supplies last.)

A second Howl-n-Purr Grub Club event is being planned for Saturday, October 24, 2020. All that Tails of Hope, Inc. asks in return is — if safe for your pet — pet parents bring their dogs in cars (or car-lovin' cats) for a fun photo, and that pet parents "like" Tails of Hope, Inc. on Facebook.

In addition to Tails of Hope, Inc., Diane volunteers with Hermitage Kiwanis, Meals on Wheels, Literacy Council and Faith Presbyterian Church. When she's not volunteering, Diane enjoys spending time with her husband, John Webster, and her sweet miniature poodle, Lilly. With service to children, elderly, community and beloved animals as a lifelong priority in her life, Diane is creating a proud legacy for the community. **V**

Tails of Hope, Inc. is located at 2450 Hoezle Road, Hermitage.

Information: 724.346.4673, tailsofhopewpa.org or find @TailsofHopePA on Facebook.

Photos Contributed

Dogust 1

Celebrating a Lifetime of Love from Adopted Animals

*A Q&A With Angelia Sherman,
Shenango Valley Animal Shelter Manager*

Each year, August 1 is celebrated throughout animal shelters nationally in honor of “Dogust 1” — the universal birthday for shelter dogs! Created by North Shore Animal League America in 2008, Dogust 1 raises awareness on shelter animals and celebrates all the furry family members who have found their homes through a local shelter.

Shenango Valley Animal Shelter Manager Angelia Sherman answered some important questions about shelter animals in honor of the national event.

What is an animal shelter and how do animals find their way in shelters? Animal shelters, formerly known as “pounds,” have come a long way. Though there are still “high-kill shelters” out there, they are becoming less common. An animal shelter is a resource center for stray animals and for owners who can no longer afford their animals and need to re-home them for various reasons, such as illness or housing conflicts. Most animal shelters make sure their pets are spayed and neutered before leaving the facility to help with population control. Animal shelters also help educate the community on spaying and neutering along with helping pet owners to better understand how to care for their animals.

What questions should an individual or family consider about themselves before adopting a pet? The number one question everyone should ask themselves before getting a pet, whether it be adopting, buying or taking one for someone who can no longer

keep their pet would be: can we commit? So many people get pets and never think about the lifelong commitment it entails. The novelty of a puppy or kitten wears off and often the animals sadly find themselves at the shelter. Ask yourself if you are ready to make a commitment to that animal for their

Rule of Three

When adopting a dog

3 Days

Your new dog is trying to figure out their new home and family

3 Weeks

They have figured out they will live with you and start a routine

3 Months

Your dog has become a part of the family

Welcome Home



Angelia Sherman and her dog, Noelle, a 9 year old pit bull.
(Photo by Madeline Wansor)

entire life. Secondly, what kind of lifestyle do you lead? Do you travel often? Are you home a lot or do you work long hours? This is the second most common complaint received when people want to surrender their animal to the shelter. “I don’t have time ... I work long hours.” Something else to consider when getting a pet is the expense you will incur throughout the animal’s lifetime. Things happen and you may find yourself at the emergency clinic with a bill of \$500 or more. Though most animals leave the shelter fully vetted, you still need to follow-up on vaccines every year. All of these questions are very important to consider:

- Before you take a shelter pet home, ask yourself if you are willing to give them time.
- Be sure you fully understand that this pet will not just acclimate to your lifestyle and routine overnight ... these things take time.
- Consider that this animal’s world has been completely turned upside down. They went from having a home and a family to possibly running the streets and then spent months or even years in a facility with barking dogs and new people. To think they will arrive on night one and be “house trained” and cuddle up next to you is unrealistic. Typically it takes an animal about three months to finally feel “at home.” And just like us, they will have good days and bad days.

What questions should an individual ask about the animal while at the shelter before adopting? It’s important to ask staff and volunteers about the animal’s likes and dislikes, favorite toys, food and possible health conditions. It is also extremely important to be truthful on your application. Many times, a pet will find themselves at the shelter because they did not get along with another animal or children or possibly had a health issue that was expensive. If you have an environment where someone could get hurt or cannot afford their medical expenses, you are only hurting the animal by being untruthful. All shelters and rescues want their animals to succeed, but part of the decision-making for your new family member is based off of what you tell the shelter.

How can someone who is adopting a shelter animal prepare to best serve their new family member? The best preparation you can have for you and your new animal is knowledge. So often people do not research anything about adopting or hastily make a decision to

Shenango Valley Animal Shelter Success Story: Toby



Toby was caught by SVAS staff as a stray in Sharon. Upon intake, Toby was emaciated and his face was covered in old wounds and scars, indicating he may have been used as a bait dog. He did not have much of a personality and acted completely defeated when he was at the shelter. Toby was a good boy, but he didn't care much to be pet or play when he was at the shelter. Then, one day a family reached out to the shelter after losing their pit bull to cancer. They were absolutely devastated and looking to fill a void. When they went to the shelter, they had another dog in mind, but the staff brought Toby up and explained what he had been through. They wanted to meet him. This was the first time the staff had seen Toby act with such excitement. After that meeting, it was history. Now Toby finds himself dressing up in Halloween costumes and lounging around with his family. If I had to think of one animal that was the definition of what we do and why we do it, Toby would be it!

Photos by Stephanie Thompson



bring an animal home with no knowledge of the animal and its needs. Shelter staff and volunteers are there to educate you and answer as many questions as possible. You can never ask too many questions! We also recommend training after a dog leaves our facility, so preparing to enroll them in classes can be a great deal of help for you and your new pet. Shelters do not always know the pets' history, especially if they arrived as a stray, but staff will give you as much information about them as they have.

Shenango Valley Animal Shelter provides animal control and stray animal care to seven municipalities in the Shenango Valley. Additionally, SVAS acts as a resource center for all animal needs providing adoptions, advice and references for community needs beyond its ability. Shenango Valley Animal Shelter's mission is to provide advisement, and to assure every pet's unique story has a happily ever after. **V**

*Shenango Valley Animal Shelter is located
at 2599 Broadway Road, Hermitage.*

*Information: 724.342.5834, visit sv-as.com, email amammare@yahoo.com
or find "Shenango Valley Animal Shelter" on Facebook.*

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