

home with their new families, they're only in the store for about a week.

All animals are checked by a veterinarian before being placed at Brothers, and all the older animals are brought up-to-date on their rabies shots. Ryan insists that all cats brought into the shop have negative feline leukemia tests. Ryan feels very strongly that since feline leukemia is an incurable disease, he'd like to know whether or not it's there before an animal is placed especially since it is contagious.

Most of the animals placed at *Brothers* come from the county's extensive foster pet program. Most foster homes are private residences, which afford the animals little chance of being seen by potential permanent families. Over 400 animals a year are placed in foster homes in the county. Some animals from the shelter itself are also showcased.

"A lot of it is just the size of the cages," Eno explained. "We can't send adult large dogs, just smaller puppies, cats, and kittens. We would look for someone here that's nice but that needs a little push. Sometimes animals get overlooked. We have so many here when people come in, they just get overwhelmed looking at 150 dogs or 150 cats. We try to get the ones that have that little extra personality, that little extra something that needs to be showcased a little bit. Those are the ones that we're trying to get out so that people can see them and really appreciate their qualities."

Volunteer foster care provider and wildlife rehabilitator Vicki Waldren, who has placed some of her charges at *Brothers*, says, "They get a lot more visibility there because a lot of people shy away from the shelter, but if they come across the same animal accidentally at the pet store they're more inclined to go ahead and adopt."

Ryan claims his wife, Harley, is an excellent example of people who shy away from the shelter. "She emotionally can't handle going there," Ryan said. "There are just too many animals. It's too difficult to pick just one. She goes in there and feels like she has to save them all. She also feels emotionally drained when she leaves there and she's depressed for several days. It's hard on a lot of people to go to that type of facility and realize there are that many animals in need of homes that they can't help. They can only help one."

The Humane Society maintains ownership of the animals placed at *Brothers*, and *Brothers* is technically set up as a foster care facility. Eno explains, "They're basically acting as an auxiliary shelter. With the other pet supply stores the animals don't stay overnight because they don't have the overnight facilities, so when the animal comes back at the end of the day the applications come back at the end of the day. With

Brothers, since he's got the facilities, the animals can stay overnight. When he gets an application, he faxes it over to us and they go through the normal process. We aim for two to four days until you're approved and taking it home."

More than one application is taken per animal, but the applications are treated on a first-come, first-serve basis. The first person approved gets the animal.

Unlike a lot of animal shelters across the country, Montgomery Humane doesn't put an animal down unless it has to. As long as there is cage space or the animal has a place to stay, there is no reason to put it down.

"If we find that we can't afford to do it down the road, then we'll have to make another decision," Ryan says. "But at this time that really has nothing to do with it. We're doing it no matter what at this point. Perhaps we'll have some customers in the store buying supplies now that maybe we wouldn't have before because of the fact that we're working with shelter animals. Some people are opposed to the sale of pets."

When Ryan first made this decision, he had wanted to showcase adoptables from various animal protection groups, but that hasn't happened yet. Would, say, PETA be interested in placing animals at *Brothers*? PETA's Jenni Norton responds, "Most likely that would have to be decided through our research and investigations department, because we do rescue quite a few animals from labs and experimental conditions and try to house them. We think this is a positive move. Hopefully it will catch on around the country."

Ryan said there are similar programs to this. He has read about a shop in Ohio which is doing very well with a similar program. He also understands that a shelter in California sets cages up on street corners with signs saying, "These pets are available for adoption." *Brothers Pets* itself has volunteers come in to walk the dogs several times a day.

Vicki Waldren commented, "What *Brothers* is doing I think is just tremendous! They obviously care about animals. I'm very impressed with their attitude."

"I think this is the pet shop of the future," Becky Pugh adds. "I think we're going to have to start treating our animals with a lot more respect. I think at some point it's going to be an honor to own an animal."

Eno concludes, "It's such a common-sense idea, it's amazing nobody thought of it before." ■

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