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This little dog is available for adoption at the Liberal Animal Shelter. L&T photo/Giseelle Arredondo

By GISEELLE ARREDONDO

- Leader & Times

Animals are a huge responsibility – they have emotions, need shelter, food and water, love and respect.

Liberal is lacking in some of these areas, because there is an excess of unwanted, unknown pregnancies, stray dogs and neglect.

## Liberal needs help with stray dog problem

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Great Plains Angels for Animals president Dee Malin-Leete said that part of the problem is owners who aren't responsible enough, and she advises parents to think twice about gifting a puppy for Christmas to children.

"People think, 'Oh, what a darling Christmas present,' but children don't know how to take care of dogs," Malin-Leete said. "Children can learn a lot but the parents need to be aware, so when they get a child a puppy for Christmas, they need to think about what they're actually doing."



Great Plains Angels for Animals is a non-profit organization that rescues and adopts out animals that are unwanted or surrendered at local animal shelters.

"We work through the shelter. We are a licensed humane society. We have our 501(c)3, any contributions that people make to our organization are tax deductible," Malin-Leete said.

She added that Angels for Animals is currently working on two huge projects.

She said of all the dogs last year – 243 were returned to their owners. 199 were adopted from the shelter and they transferred to us 360 animals.

Malin-Leete explained that unlike Liberal, Denver doesn't suffer from stray dogs as much and good homes are available there.

"Louise Collins has connections with a group along the front range of Colorado, primarily in the Denver area," Malin-Leete said. "It's a network of foster homes and they don't have the excess of stray animals that we have down here. So they have graciously accepted a lot of ours and found good homes for them."

Angels for Animals is asked to provide information on the animals, such as sex, size and shot records in order for them to be transferred, she said.

Malin-Leete noted that one way for people to help is by driving the transfers that take place every other week. Angels for Animals is in need of a transport coordinator. Someone who is responsible and reliable.

There is also a need for an animal control officer at the shelter.

"Well, I think any job at the shelter would be hard, because you know eventually some of the dogs will be euthanized," Malin-Leete said.

Volunteers are also needed to walk the dogs before they are placed in their cages for the trip to Denver, she said.

"We have a van that we can transport about 20 at a time. We take them out and meet them at a designated place at a designated time and each animal already is assigned to a foster home," she said. "They have them spayed and neutered before they are placed in their permanent home. We are able to take about a fourth of the animals that come in the shelter we are able to place in homes out of this community."

She pointed out the other project, where she explained how Angels not only tries to save

animals from euthanasia but also control the amount of unwanted dog pregnancies.

She continued, "Our other goal, project, we have found a group from Loveland, Colo., that have a mobile unit to be used for spaying and neutering and they'll come to Liberal about every other month, and they do the spaying and neutering at a reduced cost, and consequently, more people are able to utilize their services.

"We need to have more of our animals spayed and neutered. The shelter, when they adopt, part of the adoption fee is the down payment on a spay or neuter, but they don't have the staff, and we don't have the staff nor do we have the official standing to do a lot of follow up, so that's one of our problems," she said.

"There's not follow up on these animals that are adopted to make certain that they are getting spayed or neutered, and we need – we try to transport the adult dogs to a place where they will be spayed or neutered, to a place where they will not be allowed to reproduce and put in good homes and we can bring in this low income, low cost neuter clinic," she said.

The clinic will be in town later this month.

"We have one scheduled for Jan. 30 and the 31, and the 1st and 2nd of February. We had them in last October and we were able to do 90 to 100 animals in the period of time they were here," she said.

Malin-Leete explained that cost should not be a problem to have one's animals neutered or spayed. She explained that there is help available.

"If individuals can't afford to have it done at all, then Angels has a grant from the city to help us with low income spaying and we can use it for these individuals who even at a reduced cost are not able to afford it, so those are our two service projects for the community and hope eventually that we will be able to see the results that these little animals are not out on the streets," she said.

Moreover, owners need to be aware of the effects of the cold weather regarding animals.

“Of course, during this kind of weather, the small ones, the young ones, the old ones will freeze to death, and there’s always the danger of them being run over or hurt by a larger animal,” she said. “They’re totally without compassion. People – we need to have education for better pet ownership and we are not quite sure how to go about doing that, but it is a big need in this community.”

Malin-Leete emphasized how little puppies pop out of nowhere while one is driving.

“They just pop off the curb and right in front of you,” she said. “We had two little ones on 11th (Street) the other night and it was after the lights were on which makes it really difficult. Liberal just has a difficult time maintaining or reducing the numbers of unwanted pregnancies.”

Malin-Leete also said that the Liberal Police Department makes an effort to help abused animals and unwanted pregnancies by a number of ways.

“There’s a lot of ways that can be controlled. Most of them can be controlled through the police department because you have to have someone that has the authority to go in and inspect and see if the animal is neglected or abused or make certain that they’ve had their shots, they’ve been spayed and neutered.

“But what we need the most, is to fix the animals to make sure they can’t reproduce. To have more than 1,100 dogs for the shelter intake for a year, that’s a lot of dogs,” she said.

She added that if someone calls the shelter, the dog or animal will eventually be cared for.

Regarding leash laws, there is a poor job of getting collars on dogs, she said.

“And so many of them, nobody is looking for them. They don’t have collars on.”

Malin-Leete held one of her little puppies on her lap, the one with the dark fur, and explained that where she was originally fostering the puppy, she decided to keep her because the puppy had a half collapsed trachea.

“I have two that came from the shelter. One that was rescued from a situation of neglect that was so bad it really was abuse and they both were pregnant,” she said. “A lot of times, I think maybe people think they will have their animal spayed or neutered but the little dog will come into heat before they’ve had it done, and they don’t even know they’re in heat and suddenly, you have a very young animal that is pregnant.”

Liberal needs to address this problem. Until then, animals will keep suffering, she said.

“It’s a problem that the community needs to address more aggressively. We need more low income or low cost spaying and neutering.

For the animals that are already in the hands of the shelter, they could use some compassionate and loving owners.

The shelter has cute dogs, Malin-Leete said.

“The always have some nice ones out there.”

Malin-Leete said that she “would like to acknowledge the staff at the shelter and for being for so cooperative on transferring the animals and working with us and getting them ready to go.

“There’s a lot of cooperation between us and the shelter,” she said.

She added that there will be a transport on Saturday the 18th, and that “several of us at Angels have animals we have taken out of the shelter and we are taking care of them until we transport them so they are not put down because they are full.”

Malin emphasized that Liberal has a problem.

“It’s incredibly important to Liberal, they don’t realize how important it is when people come to town and are looking into moving here, moving a business here and while they drive around the neighborhoods and see half a dozen loose or running dogs, and some, obviously, you can tell they’ve been out for quite a while. They’re thin and their behavior gives them away. It doesn’t look good for a community not to take care of it’s pets.

“I think pet care would be wonderful to be included in grade school curriculum in some way, under health care or whatever, but pets need more than a bone thrown to them once in a while,” she said.

She recalled the time that there was an outbreak of Parvo in Liberal.

Malin-Leete said diseases spread between dogs easier when they are loose.

“If ones infected, they all are. It’s very contagious. Parvo is worse in the summer. It can pop up and be a problem anytime. The shelter’s walls are cinder block. They are difficult to clean so germs are not in those open places in the block... puppies need to be vaccinated quickly when they’re old enough... Try to get some immunity to something like that,” she said.

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