

S.A.R.A.'s Treasures - more than a gift and thrift

River Road store supports animal rescues in Lane County

By VICTORIA STEPHENS
FOR THE TRIBUNE

The mission of S.A.R.A.'s Treasures (Shelter Animal Resource Alliance) is 'to rescue, assist and advocate for shelter animals.' Conveniently located at 871 River Road, shopping in their gift boutique and thrift store is a unique experience. Besides finding amazing deals, about a dozen cats live within the store.

"There are always 12 cats in the store and 34 total in the program in temporary foster care," said manager Melinda McCormick, who is the co-executive director along with Jessica Berg.

"What makes it fun is you are shopping with cats. Some customers carry cats around while they shop," said Nicole West the store's cat rescue coordinator and assistant manager.

The company grew out of a need to fund transport services for dogs to the Oregon Humane Society and was founded in 2001 by Diana Robertson, a Greenhill Humane Society volunteer that saw "too many dogs put down."

The program has rescued 769 cats and 958 dogs to date. Most of the dog rescues were from the beginning of their history but has now shifted nearly entirely to cats.

There were "a lot of outlets for dogs. No one was pulling in cats," said McCormick. "We have a public face where cats can be seen every day. We really pride ourselves on the fact that cats are accessible seven days a week; unlike LCAS (Lane County Animal Services) and Greenhill, which both close two days a week."

The store cannot accept animals directly at its thrift store site.

"We don't take animals directly from the public here, we can't," said West. "All animals come through the pound," said McCormick. "Usually when we get cats they're sick. We don't put a cat up for adoption until they are spayed or neutered, tested, vaccinated, micro-chipped and healthy."

She said, "Fees usually run \$50-\$150 per cat, depending on if they have had to have medical treatment. We send nearly \$200 worth of food and supplements, toys, cat bed and ID tags home with the owner." This includes around the clock phone access for advice.

Encouraging pet retention is one of the group's goals, asking, "What can we do to help you keep your animal? Education is a lot of our mission," she said. Unlike other shelters they can offer advice personally. "We believe in strictly indoor cats. Every

animal adopted out has a life time return policy because we never want them to go back to a shelter."

When the back warehouse was connected by a door to the thrift store it provided two-thirds more space for operations so donations could be sorted and stored for various seasons. Over time, the program has grown. Now there are about 24 active volunteers upon which the group heavily relies.

"Our store is mostly run by volunteers. We always need volunteers to help in the store," said West.

Fundraising events include a Mother's Day plant and artisan sale, lot sales about once a month, and on July 17 to celebrate their 10-year anniversary, they will be having a carnival with raffles, games and live music.

"We're always in the Eugene Celebration and the parade," said McCormick. During the summer their parking lot sales are especially important because "we are in direct competition with yard sales."

Donations of items to the thrift store have dropped since the economic downturn.

"We're getting half as many donations since the change in the economy," said West. "And our main fundraiser is the thrift store." Donations are accepted seven days a week from 10am to 6pm. Donations of jewelry, household items, higher-end clothing, good-quality clean furniture, knickknacks and media such as CDs, DVDs and books are suggested.

"We probably have the cheapest books in town," said McCormick. Usually paperback books are .75 cents and hardbound books are \$2. Newer books may be higher and clearance books are 25 cents. "We have sales all the time posted on the sandwich board out front." Sales are announced on Facebook and "our Facebook friends get special discounts."

Besides gift items the group sells high quality pet food, treats and toys and products that they have particularly



PHOTOS BY VICTORIA STEPHENS

S.A.R.A.'s Treasures Gift and Thrift Store Manager and Co-executive Director Melinda McCormick (left) holds Brazil (Nut) and Assistant Manager Nicole West (right) holds Nutter Butter. These are two of the dozen cats that the group has rescued currently in the thrift store for adoption.



picked out without mark-ups. They even sell a 'cat sitter' DVD, which is a movie, made for cats. There are actually two volumes with different animals and birds, mostly from Hawaii singing on it.

"Our kitties aren't mousers, they're family members," said West. "We name all of our cats and never repeat a name," said McCormick as she picked up a cat named Brazil.

S.A.R.A.'s Treasures is located at 871 River Road.



PHOTOS BY VICTORIA STEPHENS

The promotional sandwich board in front of S.A.R.A.'s Treasures Gift and Thrift Store.

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