

# League Links 2.0

A quarterly newsletter from the  
League for Animal Welfare

*Clermont County Animal Shelter staff Margot Light and Christine Davis treat head wounds that stray dog Milkdud arrived with.*



In 2020, Clermont County was unable to reach a contract agreement with Clermont Animal CARE, the non-profit organization that had run the shelter since 2017. With no other bids for the shelter's contract, Clermont County opted to take over leadership itself in January 2021 - the first time in its history, after having various non-profit partners run it for 3 decades.

To put it mildly, that decision has not been without its detractors.

Early frustrations centered on the county's decision to shelter only stray dogs, and not cats (the Ohio Revised Code requires only that a County be accountable for its stray dog populations; there is no legally mandated care for cats in county shelters. Of the approximately 30 Ohio municipalities that run their own city or county shelters, none of them provide direct cat care covered by their own budgets). When the League for Animal Welfare was able to bridge that gap, doubling (and then tripling!) our cat intake to absorb the Clermont homeless cat population, much of that concern was allayed.

Other early concerns were raised about whether a municipally-run shelter could maintain no-kill status (a designation for shelters that save 90% or more of their animals), or might resort to euthanizing dogs for space. County leadership indicated they were committed to that bar and have stuck to that pledge: they have earned a "no-kill" designation each year since 2021. "Taking great care of our dogs is the top priority. We are proud to operate as a no-kill shelter," said shelter leadership.

But targeting the shelter would not end there. Though tensions were quiet for most of the first three years of County leadership, they bubbled over in summer 2024 - dominating online discussions, Commission meetings, and local news outlets for months.

## THE FIGHT FOR CLERMONT COUNTY'S ANIMAL SHELTER

*A Change in Leadership Ruffled Feathers - But Looks Forward to Tail Wags*

# Cat People vs. Dog People

AN EVOLUTION IN TWO PARTS

Studies have shown that dog people, as a group, tend to be more extroverted and agreeable; cat people, more solitary and open-minded (you may argue, echoing the stereotypical traits of the species themselves).

But what do they say about dog people who *become* cat people, and vice-versa?

While most volunteers at the League would insist that they love all animals, most volunteers at the League are *also* known for a predilection towards one or the other. Bruce Walters is a dog person. Keith Gossage is a cat person. We know this as steadfastly as we know that Joe Burrow is the best quarterback in the League and Cincinnati's pigs fly.

Or do we?

In 2024, both League volunteers underwent an evolution. And you were as likely to see Keith walking a dog as you were to see Bruce cuddling a kitten. You're not confused - these two dedicated volunteers, who have collectively logged more than 7,000 volunteer hours over the combined 4 decades they've been at the League, have migrated between species.

And their experience may convince you, too.



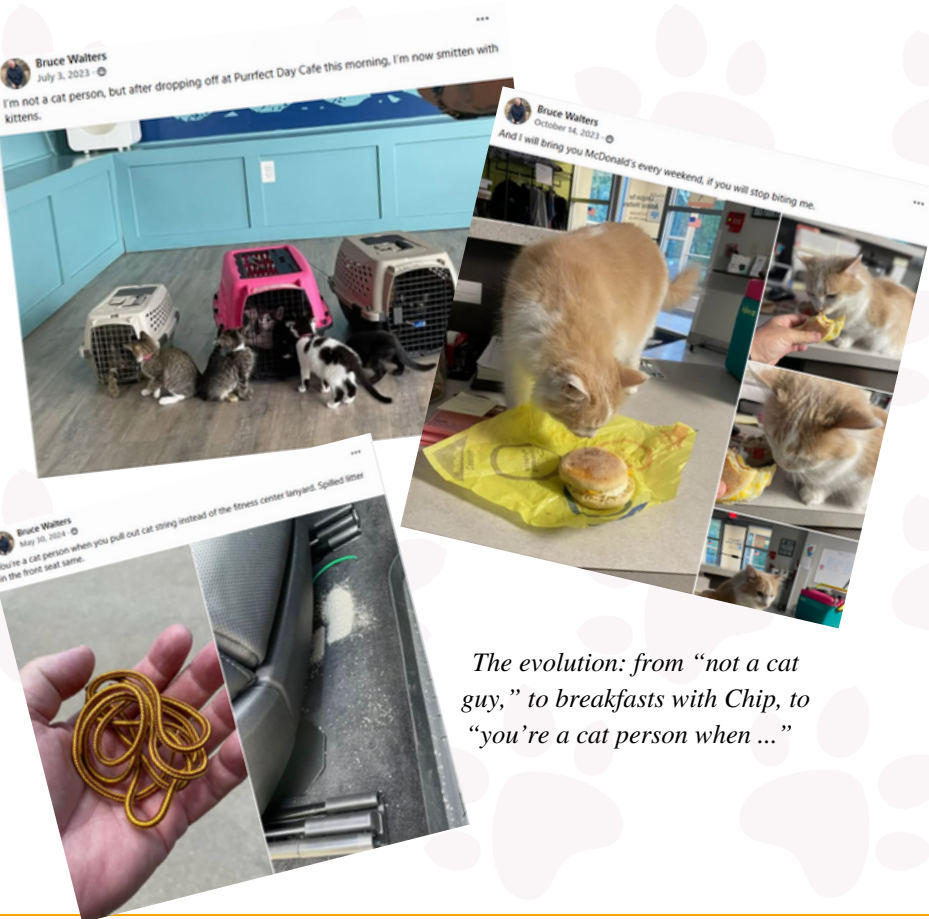
*Bruce, in his natural habitat*

## BECOMING A "CAT" GUY

Bruce's descent into "catness" began innocently enough. In 2022 - 10 years after he started volunteering with dogs at the League, and after adopting 3 dogs from here - Bruce offered to transport cats to the League from another shelter. We thought nothing of it - after all, Bruce is allergic to cats, right? What's a short car ride between non-friends who make you sneeze?

But once you go cat, do you ever go back?

After a series of ever-increasing cat contacts, in May of 2024, Bruce brought home his first kitten fosters. Pictures of his torn up legs and arms, the casualties of tiny kitten claws, followed. He was - literally and figuratively - hooked. In 2024, Bruce fostered 12 kittens. His most recent: Lucky Charm, a tiny brown tabby who had been in a house explosion that killed scores of other cats, and left her with lacerations and a broken leg. "She was my favorite ... bloodied and scorched ... she was in a stupor but was brilliantly resilient and became a hilarious little house guest." [We thought for sure Bruce would cave and adopt Lucky Charm - but when asked, he simply said "but then I can't foster the next one."]



*The evolution: from "not a cat guy," to breakfasts with Chip, to "you're a cat person when ..."*

## DO DOGS HAVE MORE FUN?

While Bruce started hitting up the cats, another evolution was happening: Keith Gossage was a man-about-town with ... dogs?!? Keith has been volunteering with the League since 1999, logging thousands of hours over that quarter century. But until the spring of 2023, it was a steady diet of cat activities on his resume.

It made sense, given Keith's history - he grew up with cats his whole life, starting with Tommy the orange tabby as a toddler. Keith continued to have cats into adulthood, even turning wife Karen into a cat person. But when Karen and Keith noticed some new volunteer activities with the dogs - Sunday hikes and field trips with dogs, no experience needed - the time felt ripe. Now, Keith splits his time evenly between the two species, taking dogs out for field trips as often as he spends time with the cats.

## LESSONS FROM THE DARK SIDE

So where will our dynamic duo land, in the end - are they cat people or dog people? "Before: cat person 100%," said Keith. Now: dog person by day, cat person at night. Just like Batman?"



Keith, at 4, with the cat who started it all, Tommy the tabby.

*Can't we have it all?*

*"Dog Person by day; Cat Person at night. Just like Batman."*

As for Bruce? As arthritis in his knees made it harder to get some of the bigger dogs out for walks, the move towards the more delicate species seemed a good fit. He worked through his allergies by spending increasing amounts of time in the League's cat rooms (though floofy Chip still makes him sneeze). After all, "homeless cats seems as worthy of love as homeless dogs," Bruce admits. "[But I'm] still leary of adult cats!" [Chip accepts no responsibility for Bruce's equivocation ...].

For now, both have maintained an equilibrium between the two - but what lessons might tilt that? "I didn't realize how solitary the dogs have it at the shelter, compared to cats in the cat rooms," said Keith of the most surprising thing he's learned in the enemy's camp.

In addition to helping mitigate the dogs' relative boredom, it's connections Keith has made to his new barky friends that he treasures: "I've walked so many amazing dogs over the 2 years ... having patience to finally be part of Zumi's circle ... I Remember Donkey shaking in his kennel so scared ... [then] seeing how awesome he is with his new family." And the connections with people and nature - with dogs, he spends more time outside on the trails at the League; and has formed bonds with other dog volunteers. "[Freud said] 'Time spent with cats is never wasted.' I quickly learned the same is true with dogs," mused Keith.

As for Bruce, cats have given him a way to "continue to add value and contribute to rescue work," he explained. "There's so



*The dog who has left the biggest impression on Keith? Birdie. "Fell head over heels for Birdie. Such a big personality. Big smile. Even her pouty look I loved."*

much published about kitten season ... [with volunteer opportunities like fostering and transporting] you make a commitment for a week, or a 50 mile round trip, and you change an animal's life without making a 10-year commitment." And without doing additional damage to aging knees!

Whichever side you take in the great debate between cats vs. dogs, Keith and Bruce can attest: you can find the right fit at the League! Want to weigh in? Email us at [carrie@lfaw.org](mailto:carrie@lfaw.org) to find out how to volunteer!

## The Fight for Clermont County's Animal Shelter (Continued)

Volunteers at the shelter began lodging public complaints in every forum - from street protests, to unrelenting critiques on social media, in the press, and at hearings. Accusations ranged from unsanitary conditions; to overly restrictive policies on volunteers; to misappropriating a restricted donation. No fewer than 15 stories were run in local news outlets about the allegations, with sensationalist quotes like "The dogs' lives are at stake" (WCPO, August 2024) and "this shelter is dying" (WCPO, December 2024).

Were these dire warnings true?

### GROWTH, CHANGE, & STRUGGLE

"Sheltering is hard work; it can certainly look like messy, disorganized work; it can even look neglectful, if you've got an uncharitable bias. And I think every shelter and rescue in the region has been on the wrong side of someone's attempt to discredit them, unfortunately," said League Board Member Barb Casciani.



A volunteer taught Cyrus, CCAS' longest resident shown here with staffer Max Simmons, to give high fives.

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"We've been working with CCAS all along," said League Director Devon Smith. "We partner with them on things like hoarding cases involving cats; we transfer some of their dogs to the League; we spay/neuter their dogs every week; we occasionally consult on medical cases. None of that has changed over the 4 years, other than occasionally having a new contact for communications," she continued. "There was nothing alarming going on. Just your normal challenges in sheltering - finding good people to do really hard work, consistently. We all battle that."

But to be sure, assuming leadership of a shelter is a challenge, and having the county run the shelter for the first time in decades has come with growing pains and changes. "We are always looking to continually improve," said County Communications Coordinator, Ursula Miller. "Among the most important lessons ... is how to better balance staff responsibilities to provide the best care."

Miller, and Interim Kennel Administrator Angie Livesay, admit that challenges, like staff turnover in 2024, were tough. "One of our biggest challenges is hiring employees ... this job requires hard, physical work that is also emotional," acknowledged Livesay. "But right now, we have a really good staff in place," says Livesay.

"My priority has been to assess what we could do better and to implement changes to improve how we run the shelter. After assessing how other county governments in Ohio run their shelters, we restructured some positions in the past year and created a new, permanent position to oversee the administration of our shelter, the role I am serving in now, until we hire my replacement," said Livesay. "The county wants me to return to my actual role as deputy assistant county administrator and I do too!" Livesay added

The County has been searching for a permanent Shelter Director since June,



CCAS dogs Snowball and Spotty get to know each other in the play yard. Livesay admits it is primarily volunteers who get dogs out for group play time; but hopes that the addition of staff will free up more time for them to focus on this type of enrichment.

but have increased efforts. They are launching a marketing campaign about the position; and have evaluated the competitiveness of wages and benefits for all positions. The Director search was briefly on pause while the County considered partnering with an outside firm to provide shelter management. A Request for Proposals was issued in December 2024, but the county only received one proposal, which lacked details and didn't address its needs. "We explored that option before recommitting to finding a Director," Livesay explained.



## The Fight for Clermont County's Animal Shelter (Continued)

### COMMON GROUND

What, then, has led to all these accusations, as the County has found its footing in sheltering? "Well-meaning volunteers have been pushing for change ... While their passion is clear ... their approach isn't always effective," surmised Renee Bates, Director of the Brown County Humane Society (a non-profit run county shelter). "It has created a divide, an 'us vs. them' mentality. That only makes progress harder to achieve - running a shelter is tough work; and without public support, it's even more difficult."

Livesay acknowledges that volunteers have been an incredible help, in spite of tensions. They "provide such significant support and vital enrichment ... they help every day [to] walk, bathe, socialize, foster dogs. [Get dogs] in playgroups and to go off-site to get fresh air," she says with obvious gratitude. Bates agrees that these are all things County shelters *must* do to provide 21st century sheltering. "Meeting the minimum requirements in the ORC won't be enough, public expectations are far higher. The community deserves a shelter that not only protects, but cares for all animals in the area," Bates says.



*New outdoor kennels are slated for construction, to increase outdoor time for dogs like Timon and improve sanitation.*

The County appears to be committed to sheltering this way. Its budget - a hurdle that led them to break ties with non-profits in 2021 - has tripled, reflecting an understanding that quality care is costly, and getting costlier. This increase in the county budget has been used by detractors to criticize the shelter, suggesting it indicates operational inefficiency. "What a crazy spin!" commented League Director Smith. "For all of us who care about sheltering, we should be absolutely rejoicing that they have increased their budget - to me, it reflects their growth; their better understanding of how much it takes to run a shelter; their investment in getting it right. I was so happy when I heard the budget increased - and certainly perplexed when animal welfare advocates weaponized it."

So how does the shelter move forward, to regain public trust? "Before I came to the shelter," shared Communications Coordinator Miller, who joined the County in October, "I wondered if it were an operational problem or a communications problem [leading to the tension]. Now that I'm here and see how the shelter operates, I see: it's a communications problem."

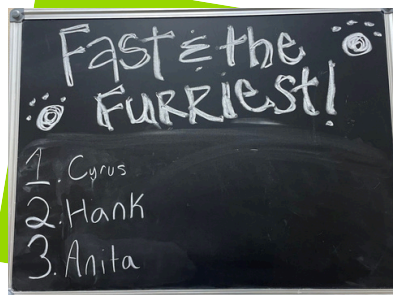
Miller's role: to help highlight some of the wonderful successes the shelter has had. She talked about the commitment of the current staff, who stayed overnight at the shelter for 48 hours in January during a snowstorm to ensure great care of the dogs; and about successful efforts that led to adopting out 33 of 39 dogs that came from a challenging hoarding case.

Chief Dog Warden Tim Pappas, who has been with the shelter since 2022, agrees that a lot of the public discussion is

unfair. "Don't listen to what they say about [Livesay]," he commented, about the Interim Director who has been the target of much of the vitriol. "She's doing a good job here."

Livesay herself is open to face-to-face discussions, to help ease some of the miscommunications. "My door is open," she said ("but still, my top priority is finding someone to take over my role!"). And Livesay acknowledged that, while some new policies, put in place to ensure safety and standardization (like formalized procedures for sending dogs to rescue, and written volunteer policies), may have changed how the movement of dogs and people looked, as the shelter grows those processes may adapt to meet the flow that best serves the dogs in their care.

"They deserve grace," said Smith. "We all end up having to learn on the job - it's just how sheltering goes. If we're lucky, we get to learn - and make mistakes - in a supportive environment, surrounded by people who want you to succeed. Clermont County leadership hasn't gotten that grace. But there is so much to indicate that the shelter is on a good path: an increased budget; a commitment to no-kill; a focus on staff structure and training; new partnerships to provide affordable vet care; updating facilities. They will be just fine - and they'll get there a whole lot quicker with our support."



*A chalkboard in the hallway reminds staff and volunteers who the longest doggie residents are at CCAS. "Their longest resident has been in their shelter for less than a year; some of our dogs have been with us for 3+ years. They're doing something right!" said Devon Smith.*

# SAVE THE DATE!

## Whiskey & Whiskers' 10th Annual Gala Returns September 27

Whiskey & Whiskers is back, and it's going to be a perfect 10! The League will host its largest fundraising gala on Saturday, September 27th from 7-10pm at the Manor House in Mason.

With food, drinks, games, and hundreds of animal lovers coming together, this event hopes to raise \$150,000 for lifesaving care for homeless animals.

"Whiskey & Whiskers is our main fundraiser," said Executive Director Devon Smith. "We lean on it to raise about 10% of our operating budget - we couldn't save the animals we do without it!"

The 2024 gala brought in \$140,000, including sponsorships from local businesses, ticket sales, and proceeds from its live and silent auctions. With new programs at the shelter - like an expanded public veterinary clinic to

help sick and injured pets - the League hopes the event can grow, too.

"The League has developed so much to meet the needs of our community and its pets," Smith said. "We know we can build on Whiskey & Whiskers to increase lifesaving funds for this work."

How can you help? "We are looking for local businesses to sponsor the event - it's a great way to connect your business to our compassionate community. And anyone can help by donating items for auction - bottles of wine, whiskey, or other liquors; gift cards or tickets to local events; a donated service or talent; or even new items, like a purse you won't use - it all adds up!"

Watch for ticket sales to open in early June at <https://www.lfaw.org/events/whiskey-and-whiskers/>



ADOPT ME



### Rigatoni - 8 years old, female

Rigatoni happens to be quite stunning, as you can see - and that gets Rigatoni a lot of looks from people who don't understand her. But Rigatoni needs a true CAT person - someone who not only respects, but treasures the capricious nature of the species. You might find Rigatoni, with her chin nestled lovingly in someone's outstretched skritch hand, soaking up human attention; or you might find her literally biting the hand that feeds her. Long story short: she's a cat, in all the beautiful glory of cats. You will never tire of this girl's antics - and you might just earn yourself a best friend.



### Maisie - 4 years old, female

Maisie was adopted from the League in 2023, and basked in the glow of having a loving mom for a year-and-a-half. But her person died last fall, and Maisie's extended family couldn't keep her. While we're always a safety net for our alums, Maisie - a loving, snuggly, happy, silly, playful, fun, sweet dog - is really chafing at the confines of shelter life. This bright pup, who every instantly falls in love with, is starting to dull, and it's heartbreaking. Maisie is amazing with all people, and will win you over as soon as you meet. She does need to be the only pet in the home - but trust us, you won't need anyone else when you have a Maisie in your life.

[View all the cats and dogs available for adoption at LFAW.org/adoption-center](https://www.lfaw.org/adoption-center)