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Voorhees LIVING

Animal Orphanage

A Safe Haven for South Jersey Pets

Cover Photo By Carrie Nelson Photography

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- TREE CARE THAT'S ROOTED IN SERVICE
- GETTING PREPARED FOR THE HOLIDAY
- A TASTE OF TRADITION AT FIENIS
- PERSONALIZED CARE, FROM THE INSIDE OUT
- HELPING BUSINESSES MAKE THEIR MARK
- NAVIGATING SUPPORT SERVICES
- FINDING JOY RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE

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ANIMAL ORPHANAGE:

A Safe Haven for South Jersey Pets

By Brandi Hopkins

Animal Orphanage has been giving South Jersey's lost, abandoned, and surrendered pets a second chance since 1988. For more than three decades, the organization has been a place animals can count on when they have nowhere else to go. Located on Cooper Road in Voorhees, the nonprofit, open-intake municipal shelter has cared for more than 44,000 cats and dogs since opening its doors in 1988.

Today, Animal Orphanage serves 26 municipalities throughout South Jersey, including Voorhees Township. For local residents, that means the shelter is more than a place to find a new pet. It is the municipal shelter responsible for taking in stray animals found in Voorhees and helping reunite them with their families or, when that is not possible, finding them a new home.

"We aren't simply an adoption center. We are their municipal animal shelter," says Jennifer Bailey, Marketing Director at Animal Orphanage. That distinction is an important part of understanding the organization and the work that happens there every day.

As an open-intake shelter, Animal Orphanage does not get to choose which animals it takes in. Some arrive as strays or lost pets. Others are surrendered by owners who can no longer care for them. They may be young or old, healthy or in need of significant medical care. Some are reunited with their families within days, while others may spend weeks or months waiting for the right home.

"Our responsibility is the same for every one of them," Bailey says. "We keep them safe, provide the care they need and give them the best possible chance at a positive outcome." That work includes much more than providing food and shelter. Staff and volunteers walk dogs, organize playgroups, provide enrichment, socialize cats and, of course, spend plenty of time giving animals the attention they need. The goal is not simply to move an animal into a new home, but to make the right match and give each adoption the best chance of succeeding.

For Bailey, that mission is personal. Her connection to Animal Orphanage began more than 15 years ago, when her family adopted a Pointer mix named Tucker. When she brought Tucker back to the shelter's annual Woofstock Festival the following year, she saw how excited the volunteers were to see one of their former shelter dogs happy and thriving. That experience inspired her to become a volunteer dog walker.

What started as volunteering eventually became a much larger part of her life. Bailey later joined the Board of Directors and eventually brought her professional background in business, finance and project management into marketing and fundraising. She has now served as Animal Orphanage's Marketing Director for nearly ten years.

Along the way, the shelter became a family affair. Her husband, daughter, siblings, nieces, nephews and friends have all volunteered at Woofstock and other shelter events. "I joke that you can't be in my family without eventually getting recruited to help at a shelter fundraiser," she says.

Photos By Carrie Nelson Photography

One of Bailey's favorite memories involves Thimble, a Mastiff mix who spent months waiting for the right home. During that time, Thimble occasionally joined Bailey in her office, curling up under her desk while Bailey worked on emails, grants and fundraisers. Eventually, Thimble was adopted. More than a year later, she returned to visit the shelter.

Bailey wasn't sure whether Thimble would remember her. She quickly got her answer. "The second she saw me, she went absolutely crazy with excitement," Bailey says.

Moments like that are a reminder of why the work matters. Seeing an animal leave the shelter happy, healthy and loved is rewarding. Knowing that animal remembers the people who cared for them along the way makes it even more meaningful. That work depends on the community, too.

CONTINUED ON **PAGE 12**

"When an animal comes through our doors, we don't ask whether they're cute enough, small enough, young enough, healthy enough or easy enough to find a home," Bailey says. "They're here because they need us, and we're here to care for them."

Animal Orphanage relies on municipal fees, adoption fees and charitable donations to keep the shelter operating. Its largest annual community event, the Woofstock Festival, recently celebrated its 30th anniversary. The event brings together local families, pet owners, vendors, rescue groups and supporters while raising funds for medical care, food, shelter and enrichment.

But support doesn't require attending an event or making a large donation. Residents can adopt, foster, volunteer, donate supplies, sponsor events, organize fundraisers or simply share adoptable animals on social media. Local businesses can also get involved through sponsorships, in-kind donations and community partnerships.

Even something as simple as sharing a photo of an adoptable pet can make a difference. "The right share really can put an animal in front of the person who has been waiting for them," Bailey says.

RESIDENT **FEATURE**

CONTINUED FROM **PAGE 11**

And that community support matters because an open-intake shelter cannot simply close its doors when it reaches capacity. When the municipalities it serves need help, the shelter has to be there. That responsibility is part of what makes the organization so vital. It is also what makes Animal Orphanage such an important part of Voorhees.

For nearly four decades, the shelter has been here when a lost dog needs somewhere safe to go, when a frightened cat needs care, when a family needs help, or when an animal simply needs someone to give them another chance.

"When an animal comes through our doors, we don't ask whether they're cute enough, small enough, young enough, healthy enough or easy enough to find a home," Bailey says. "They're here because they need us, and we're here to care for them."

That is what being an open-intake municipal shelter means. And for the animals who need it, that makes Animal Orphanage home.

DO YOU KNOW A NEIGHBOR WHO HAS A STORY TO SHARE? //
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