



winter 2009



chronicles from the connection

Saving "Lammie"

It was early March when the dog we first referred to as "Lambchop" was found wandering the streets of Grand Rapids. The small white dog's fur was dirty and severely matted, and the mats had formed a solid mass around his mouth. Unable to eat or drink, he was severely dehydrated and slowly starving to death.

When he arrived at the Kent County Animal Shelter, shelter workers immediately shaved him, removing four pounds of filthy, matted fur from the tiny, seven-pound dog. Limited resources prevented them from doing much more. Lambchop's organs were shutting down due to severe dehydration; he was in dire need of emergency medical care.

The Turning Point

A volunteer from Vicky's Pet Connection happened to be at the shelter that day. She saw the small dog in a stainless steel cage, swaying slightly as he struggled to remain standing. He blinked incoherently. Weak, confused and with his white coat shaved close to his skin, he resembled a newborn lamb. Hence, the name he was given—Lambchop.

She pondered the options. Not doing anything meant certain death. Taking him would mean extensive vet bills and no guarantee that he would survive. But there was something about the little dog that suggested he was worth trying to save.

Discovering the Real "Lammie"

Lambchop's life changed that day. Vicky's Pet Connection volunteers rushed him to Dr. Smith, a local veterinarian who, for two weeks, worked tirelessly to save him with intravenous fluids, forced feedings and round-the-clock care.

Once his condition was stabilized, Lambchop was taken in by the co-founders of Vicky's Pet Connection — Vicky and Nancy — who continued his round-the-clock care until he became stronger.

As he healed, Lambchop's personality began to



emerge. The shy, once-frail little dog was sweet and silly and charmed everyone with his smile and playful demeanor.

Finally, he was well enough to be adopted. A family in Ada fell in love with him and eagerly took him in, willing to accommodate his special dietary requirements that resulted from his brush with death.

Living Happily Ever After

Renamed "Lammie" by his new family, the once starving, near-death dog is a happy 15-pound bundle of energy, joy and affection. His family even fenced in their back yard to create a playground for their much-

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bringing people and pets together

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loved new addition and their other pets. They refer to it as "Lammie Park."

Our Challenge

Lammie's story has a happy ending, but that's not the case for all animals that end up at shelters.

The number of abandoned, neglected and unwanted animals that end up in Kent County shelters is staggering. Only a small percent are ever adopted. Shelters have limited space and resources, so each year, thousands of animals are euthanized — whether they are strays or unwanted or lost pets. Injured and critically ill animals are the first to be put down.

At Vicky's Pet Connection, we're realists. We know we can't save every cat and dog.

With your continued support, however, we can help some like Lammie beat the odds and live happily ever after in their "forever" home.

See our special insert for information on Buddy's Big Fix Fund. This special fund is earmarked for those animals, like Lammie, in need of aggressive veterinary care.

How You Can Help

Your donations help us cover food, medical treatment and the many other expenses associated with rescuing and finding homes for cats and dogs. For some of the animals we take in, those expenses can run in the hundreds or even thousands of dollars. But we believe that whenever possible, all cats and dogs deserve a chance and are worth every penny of every donation we receive. Lammie's family would agree. Donations may be made online at www.vickypetconnection.com or by mail.

For the ones passed by...

One by one, they pass by my cage,
"Too old, too worn, too broken, no way."
"Way past her time, she can't run and play."
Then they shake their heads slowly and go on their way.
A little old girl, arthritic and sore,
It seems I am not wanted anymore.
I once had a home, I once had a bed,
A place that was warm, and where I was fed.
Now my muzzle is grey, and my eyes slowly fail.
Who wants a dog so old and so frail?
My family decided I didn't belong,
I got in their way, my attitude was wrong.
Now I sit in this cage, where day after day,
The younger ones get adopted away.
When I had almost come to the end of my rope,
You saw my face, and I finally had hope.
You saw through the grey, and the legs bent with age,
And felt I still had life beyond this cage.
You took me home, gave me food and a bed,
And shared your own pillow with my poor tired head.
We snuggle and play, and you talk to me low,
You love me so dearly, you want me to know.
I may have lived most of my life with another,
But you outshine them with a love so much stronger.
I may be with you for a week, or for years,
We will share many smiles, you will no doubt shed tears.
And when the time comes that God deems I must leave,
I know you will cry and your heart, it will grieve.
And when I arrive at the Bridge, all brand new,
My thoughts and my heart will still be with you.
And I will brag to all who will hear,
Of the person who made my last days so dear.

See our special insert for information on Golden Paws, our program dedicated to rescuing senior pets from animal shelters!

Holiday Wishes



Please visit the Critter Cottage and dig deep in your pockets to leave something for our critters!

When you visit the store, you will find a list of our food and supply needs (or visit www.vickypetconnection.com). Treats, toys and food can be purchased at the Critter Cottage. Please understand that a consistent diet is critical to the health of our animals. If you'd like to donate pet food, we ask that you contact the Critter Cottage for our preferred brand.

Your donation will be doubled. Karen and Jerry DeBlaay have graciously offered to match bag for bag any Nutripet dog or cat food, dog or cat Treats and cat litter purchased at the Critter Cottage. Don't forget, we can even take your donation purchase over the phone with a credit card! Call us at (616) 682-4355.

The New and Improved **Critter Cottage**



After serving as a "by appointment only" animal adoption center and under various owners as a pet supply store, the Critter Cottage is back — and better than ever!

The Critter Cottage is managed and staffed entirely by volunteers and a percentage of sales helps support Vicky's Pet Connection.

Gifts for Discriminating Pets and Pet Owners

Locally made, one-of-kind products include catnip-filled toys (check out the catnip-filled pickles and martini olives), animal statues carved by a local artisan and uniquely designed Cat Mountain cat trees. (See the ones in our adoption center!)

You'll also find a selection of unique pet collars, beds and other pet products, as well as clever, pet-themed home décor and apparel.

Special Events

In addition to providing adorable gifts and pet products, the Critter Cottage sponsors or participates in numerous local events.

This fall marked the first "Haute Dog Howl'oween Pet Costume Contest" with pets invited to stop by the Critter Cottage in their Halloween costumes and compete for fantastic prizes for their owners.

Adoption and Outreach

As the outreach and adoption center for Vicky's Pet Connection, the Critter Cottage also provides a temporary home to adoptable cats. Two specially designed rooms house up to 10 cats. Prospective owners are invited to spend time with the cats, getting to know them.

Several other cats are also available for adoption and can be seen on the Vicky's Pet Connection web site. (Vicky's Pet Connection also sponsors adoptable cats at PetSmart on East Paris and 28th Street the first two weeks of every month.)

Dogs and puppies can also be seen on the web site and adopted by appointment or during special events.

CRITTER COTTAGE HOURS

Tuesday-Thursday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Friday & Saturday 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

(616) 682-4855

Located at 7205 Thornapple River Drive, Ada



ARE YOU A "FAN"?

Become a fan of Vicky's Pet Connection and The Critter Cottage on Facebook.

Search for us!

Special Thanks to our 2009 Critter Cottage Sponsors

Since it's inception in 2006, The Critter Cottage has become a central part of our adoption and outreach programs. Without the generosity of our building sponsors, we would be unable to support this wonderful addition to our organization.

Deb Minton & Terry Osborn
David & Michelle Bottrall
Claudia Hardy & Bill Hardy
Janet & Marty Jones
Kate Dernocoeur
BISSELL Inc.

Lois Levy
David & Michelle Bottrall
Ameriprise Financial-Ada Branch
Anonymous
Norm & Sharon Stiles
West Michigan Marketing Assoc

If you are interested in Critter Cottage sponsorship opportunities, please call 616-897-9943.

Buddy's Big Fix Fund

Buddy's Story

In 2005, like so many other lost, abandoned and neglected dogs and cats, two-year old Buddy found himself at a shelter. Dirty, hungry and seriously injured, he faced only the prospect of euthanasia. His front leg was shattered and his ears so severely infected that he had suffered partial hearing loss.

A shelter worker saw something special in his big brown eyes and called Vicky's Pet Connection. Once in our program, Buddy received life-saving medical care. Although his injured leg had to be amputated, his foster care family, Tubie and Gene Gilmore, provided him with much-needed love, support and rehabilitation.

Buddy was adopted but circumstances prevented his new family from keeping him. Because they had grown attached to Buddy while fostering him, the Gilmores welcomed him back, gladly accommodating his special needs.

Despite the trauma he had endured, Buddy was loving and affectionate. His handicap never touched his soul. He radiated love, warmth and gratitude.



About Buddy's Big Fix Fund

Buddy passed over the rainbow bridge in the spring of this year. For the Gilmores, the time spent with him was nothing less than a life-changing experience. He could never have taught us his lessons of love, kindness and patience, had he taken his last breath years earlier in that shelter.

That's why the Gilmore family established **Buddy's Big Fix Fund** on behalf of Vicky's Pet Connection. This special fund is earmarked to help those animals most in need — animals that require extensive or ongoing veterinary care or have special needs.

You can help give pets like Buddy a second chance by donating to Buddy's Big Fix Fund. All donations to this fund go directly to helping us rescue a dog or cat from a local shelter that would typically be put down because of injuries, illness or other conditions that require extensive, medical attention.

Not every dog or cat with special needs can be saved. Through Buddy's Big Fix Fund, some will be given a chance.



Golden Paws

For the ones passed by

No one will ever know why the slightly graying beagle ended up at the shelter. Maybe her owner had died or could no longer afford to keep her. Maybe they simply decided she could no longer keep up with their active lifestyle.

Shelter workers estimated she was about eight years old — a "senior" in dog years but still loving and affectionate although somewhat timid in her new surroundings. With their facility overcrowded and much younger dogs and puppies available for adoption, the shelter workers knew her prospects were dismal.

Each year, shelters euthanize thousands of dogs; older dogs are particularly vulnerable to this fate. For this particular older dog, however, there was a happier ending — because of **Golden Paws**.

\$500 Saves a Senior

Inspired by a volunteer with a particular fondness for senior dogs, and the love and joy they have brought to her life, Golden Paws is an initiative at Vicky's Pet Connection to address the heartbreaking plight of older animals who find themselves homeless in shelters. For every \$500 raised through the program, Vicky's Pet Connection rescues a senior from an animal shelter and provides funds for any special needs until the animal can be adopted.

In some cases, Golden Paws also helps offset some of the expenses that may be incurred by an older pet's new family for continuing medical care. Our lucky alumni include Mackenzie, Melville, Dorothy and Cola.

YOU CAN HELP!

To earmark a donation especially to Buddy's Big Fix Fund or Golden Paws, please simply enclose a notation along with your donation. You can send your donation by mail, or donate online at

www.vickyspetconnection.com

SPECIAL PROGRAM INSERT



Too Many But Not Enough

"We can't adopt away the problem."

~ Vicky Freund, co-founder of Vicky's Pet Connection

Feline overpopulation results in the senseless deaths of thousands of cats and kittens in Kent County annually. Despite aggressive adoption efforts, Kent County animal shelters last

year euthanized approximately 7,000 cats and kittens. Uncounted others suffered sickness, exposure, starvation, neglect, abuse or death.

To combat the problem, Vicky's Pet Connection launched an ambitious initiative this summer called "Inner City Kitties." Run by volunteers and funded entirely by donations, "Inner City Kitties" provided free spay and neuter services for cats belonging to low-income residents in Grand Rapids. Feral cats that could be live-trapped were also welcome. The 10-week program succeeded in "fixing" 490 cats, including 285 females.

Discounts, Donations and Dedication

"We feel strongly that spaying and neutering is the most effective means to prevent the births of unwanted cats and their subsequent abandonment, suffering and death," explained Val Mas, who coordinated the program on behalf of Vicky's Pet Connection.

"The success we had is due entirely to the dedication of our volunteers to make it happen — and to our supporters who provided the funds to help us accomplish as much as we did. Nearly \$10,000 was raised to fund this valuable initiative.

"We couldn't have done this without our volunteers," Val said. "They gave up almost every Thursday night during the summer to help. Some handled check-in. Others weighed the cats, a tough job that sometimes involved bites and scratches from frightened cats. Others assisted with recovery procedures. A volunteer also had to be there for check-out at 8 a.m. — after pulling an all-nighter.

"When there was a bit of down time, we even had a couple of volunteers go out to local feral colonies to trap cats to be altered."

YOU CAN HELP!

To help us cover the expenses of this past summer's *Inner City Kitties* program — and continue our efforts to prevent unwanted kittens from facing pain, suffering and death — make your donation to Vicky's Pet Connection today. Donations can be made online at www.vickyspetconnection.com or by mail.



Spays/neuters funded by VPC for low-income families*

YEAR	CATS	DOGS	COST
2004	450	27	\$ 15,969.00
2005	390	29	\$ 16,081.00
2006	873	67	\$ 32,465.00
2007	1,277	135	\$ 47,756.00
2008	1,695	175	\$ 58,440.00
2009	2,853	446	\$ 93,311.00
(as of 10/20/09)			
TOTAL	7,488	879	\$ 264,022.00

*These numbers are in **addition** to the spay/neuter surgeries for pets in our adoption program.

Also crucial to the program's success was Dr. Bruce Langlois, owner of the Animal Hospital of Lowell. Along with two of his assistants, Dr. Langlois provided discounted veterinary services in a mobile unit called the Spay and Neuter Express. A strong advocate of reducing the euthanasia of adoptable animals through population control, Dr. Langlois regularly works in conjunction with Vicky's Pet Connection.

Next Year, New Goal

According to Vicky Freund, co-founder of Vicky's Pet Connection, hitting the 490-mark with the Inner City Kitties program is just the beginning.

"We're going to continue the program and keep setting higher goals. We are making great strides towards eliminating the problem of unwanted animals and with luck, hard work and the continued dedication of our volunteers and supporters, we hope to at least eliminate the unnecessary euthanasia of adoptable pets in Kent County."

CAT ADOPTIONS at PetSmart the first two Saturdays of the month, located at 28th Street & East Paris, or during all business hours at The Critter Cottage. **DOG ADOPTIONS** by appointment and most Saturdays at The Critter Cottage, located at 7205 Thornapple River Drive in Ada Village.

Hats Off to You!



As most of you know, VPC is driven by the dedicated efforts of our volunteers. There are too many to mention by name, but you all know who you are! Without you – our foster families, adoption counselors, Critter Cottage helpers, cage cleaners and dog walkers – we wouldn't be able to provide our life-saving services to the animals of our community.

Special thanks also go out to our **veterinary partners**: Safe Harbor Animal Hospital, Animal Hospital of Lowell, Ada Hospital For Animals and Woodland Vet Clinic. Thank you for your endless hours and discounted fees to help save lives.

We also want to thank all the **local businesses** who have provided us with goods or services throughout the year. Your thoughtfulness and support is priceless!

To **every donor**: We couldn't do this without you! Whether you wrote us into your will or simply put your spare change into one of our donation boxes, you are the wheels that keep us moving ahead.

To our **adoptive families**: Thank you for choosing adoption! We wish you a long and happy lifetime with your new family members.

Visit www.vickypetconnection.com for easy ways to help the animals every day!