



Peaceable Kingdom

By Danielle S. Tepper

As told by **President Kathy Tomecek**

Animal shelters, while their intentions are noble, too often have a negative image in the public eye. Dogs and cats living their lives in cages, being put down by the hundreds, their outlook bleak and sad. This may hold true for some shelters, but not for the modest little building nestled on MacArthur Road, with its brightly painted mural welcoming all to come find their new best friend. Dogs are regularly walked around the back of the building where the thick grass and shady trees are almost enough to forget that a busy highway stretches just on the other side. The cat room is laden with fluffy blankets, beds, and toys. It's their home before they find a home.

Founded in 1998, Peaceable Kingdom began as a network of volunteers who offered their homes to cats in need. In 2004, they established their permanent shelter location at 1049 MacArthur Road in Whitehall, leased from Becky Krisko and her mother, Mary Hilbert. They now had enough space to also rescue dogs and to open a low cost spay/neuter clinic. In 2012, the organization bought the building, making it their forever home.

"When we bought it, nothing had been done to it for many years," said PK president, Kathy Tomecek. "We had to put in new AC and heat because someone had broken in and stolen all the copper piping. We repainted over all the graffiti. And now here we are."

They have a \$200,000 expansion plan that they hope to kick off in the spring of 2016, which would include moving their spay/neuter clinic. "We have a design and a dream and around \$120,000 towards our goal. We have a ways to go yet," Tomecek said.

Tomecek started with PK 13 years ago as a kitten volunteer, fostering them in her home. When a Board of Directors position opened, she figured the timing was right and she became coordinator for the entire foster



kitten program.

"Not everyone can do it all; someone is in charge of each program," she explained. "We can't afford to pay a full time staff, so we all take a piece of it, and that's how we manage."

"Without our volunteers, we wouldn't even be here. We can't thank them enough," she added. Approximately 200 people volunteer their time to Peaceable Kingdom, whether that means showing up at 6 a.m. to walk the dogs or mopping floors on Christmas Day. Every little bit of help counts, especially financially.

"There's not a lot of money today for people to donate, because there are so many worthy causes and groups," said Tomecek. "So it's amazing that people continue to donate. Every little penny helps us. We always struggle [financially], because I don't think people understand what it costs on a monthly basis just to be here. You take the animals away and there's still gas, water, electric, the mortgage. But as long as we can pay the bills, that's a good day in my world."

Aside from helpful neighbors, local businesses also do what they can. PK partners with Target, PetSmart, and more to keep their doors open, in addition to a handful of fundraisers per month, typically sourced by outside parties.

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"The issue is, our volunteers do so much already, that we don't think it's right to ask for more. So those interested in fundraising for us handle that," said Tomecek. "Restaurants have donated to us, there have been cook-offs and block parties. The outreach is amazing ... but spreading the word is still so important. There are still people out there who don't know we're here."

PK also gives back when they can. If they have a surplus of supplies for the month, they reach out to county rescues—the kind that can't turn animals away

and therefore become known as "kill shelters"—to try to lend a helping hand.

"We're able to remain 'no kill' because we only accept what our resources will allow," Tomecek explained. "We can't take kittens because we have a hard time adopting cats; when the kittens grow up, where will we put them? It's like balancing a budget. The hard part is when we're already at capacity and the volunteers arrive in the morning to find that people have just dumped animals on our doorstep overnight."

For that sad reason, Tomecek said they plan to upgrade their security system in the near future in the hopes of discouraging people from abandoning animals.

"If someone brings us a half-dead whatever, we assume all responsibility for its well-being," said Tomecek. "That's crushing to our bottom line." *(Note: Animal rescues are not the same as animal control; Lehigh County Humane Society provides animal control services in that area.)*

Tomecek hopes people understand that sometimes they just have to say no.

"I can't tell you how bad I feel when it happens," she said. "Some people don't hold back and they'll say, oh, well, my husband's going to drown it—it's on you if it dies. It's really difficult, because you don't know what will happen, but what can we do?"

Approximately 300 dogs are adopted each year, plus 500 kittens and 100 cats. Peaceable Kingdom is even willing to work with people when they don't have the room to keep an animal but those bringing it in don't have the resources to keep it themselves.

"I always tell them, if you're willing to foster, we can help," she said. "People usually say no; they just want

the problem to go away. Maybe four or five times a year, someone will do it. And we do our best. We'll give food, litter, medicine. If you're willing to help, so are we. Be part of the solution. When people step up, we try to absorb everything else."

Becoming a foster family for animals in need is a great way to help that is often overlooked. It gives the animal a safe place to stay, outside of the shelter environment, while a permanent loving home waits to be found.

"We have a ton of foster homes, but the ultimate goal is to get them into forever homes," said Tomecek. "We feel like we're doing well; even when we can't physically take an animal, we always offer some kind of help. That's what we're here for—but we need help too. We want to try to improve so that we can help more animals."

Knowing that they're helping is the most satisfying part of the "job," according to the Tomecek. "I can't say it's not stressful, and let me tell you, working in animal rescue, you really see the bad of humanity. I feel like it changes you," she said. "But you know what you're doing. Every time we see a pet go to their forever home, making someone happy, that's the reward."

Peaceable Kingdom would like to thank all of their sponsors and supporters, their former landlords Becky Krisko and Mary Hilbert, Whitehall Township for granting them permanent residence, and all of their amazing volunteers who give up their free time to love and care for the animals at PK. Anyone interested in volunteering, donating money or supplies, becoming a foster, or adopting a new family member can visit www.lvpeaceablekingdom.info for more information.



SPAY/NEUTER

Peaceable Kingdom has offered spay/neuter services since 2004. They perform up to 30 surgeries

a day, three days a week, according to their medical director, Sarah Donnelly. They work with trappers to keep the feral cat population under control. "I have no idea how there's any left in the Lehigh Valley not fixed," she laughed.

"We're not here to make a fortune, we're here to make it affordable for people to keep their animals and not have to bring any here. It has to pay for itself." They also work with No-Kill Lehigh Valley (www.nokillv.org), an organization that provides financial aid to local shelters. No animal is adopted out of PK until it is spayed/neutered and, to that end, they handle approximately 3,000 surgical cases a year.

Cats are the most difficult animals to adopt out of PK, according to Tomecek. If any of these pretty kitties catch your eye and you'd like to give them a loving forever home, please call 610-360-8771. Photos by Danielle Tepper.

