

Designer Pet Adoptions

► **By Carolyn Mitchell**

Twice a year, homeless animals prance and purr in the display windows of Chicago's swankiest boutiques.

The Angels with Tails walking tours – along Versace, Ann Taylor, and other exclusive Windy City storefronts – find homes for hundreds of cats and dogs and highlight the need for spay/neuter and adoptions to end the killing of shelter animals.

Sponsor for these festive occasions is Pets Are Worth Saving (PAWS). The nonprofit animal welfare organization was launched in 1998 by a group of animal lovers after they discovered their hometown has one of the highest shelter animal death rates in America.

“The *Sun Times* published a story about the more than 40,000 animals destroyed here every year,” says PAWS founder Paula Fasseas. “That led me to tour city shelters. I was horrified at what I saw. All those wonderful animals were going to die just because there were no homes for them.

“I thought to myself: My friends won't go to shelters, so if I could get the animals in their faces, I could help get them out of their cages and into homes.”

Placing shelter animals in the upscale storefronts along Michigan Avenue and Armitage Avenue, she realized, would accomplish those powdered-nose-to-whiskered-nose encounters.

Vice chairwoman of a consortium of six Chicago banks, Fasseas decked herself out in a power suit and started calling on store managers. Once Barney's of New York and Ralph Lauren had agreed to the project, others fell in line.

Next, she persuaded the advertising firm Ogilvy and Mather to direct the marketing and public relations work for PAWS. The ad firm came up with elegant brochures and a PAWS logo featuring bulldogs and tabbies wearing halos – a reference to the staggering number of animal angels hovering over the city.

The first year a dozen chic retail shops took part in the Angels with Tails tours; the second year, the number grew to 30, as more and more stores joined the street fairs.

All of Chicago's shelters brought cats, dogs, and rabbits to PAWS' first four Angels with Tails tours. Shoppers charmed by fluffy felines and personable pups headed home with pet carriers, as well as shopping bags.

Volunteers helped with chores, trained adoption counselors screened prospective owners, and over 100 animals were adopted at each of the Angels with Tails tours

Meanwhile, PAWS delivered their message to the media: Only one in ten Chicago shelter animals is adopted; the rest are killed.

A wave of good publicity led people to shelters to find a pet.

“These events showed thousands of people that shelter animals are just as beautiful, healthy, and smart as any you would find anywhere,” Fasseas says.

PAWS sponsors other special adoptions at Chicago malls and in the banks owned by Fasseas and her husband.

“On Sundays from noon to five, we'll open up a bank and put cages in the windows,” she says. “Shelters like Furry Friends that don't have any walk-by traffic are happy to bring their animals to the bank.”

Nowadays, PAWS volunteers arrange adoptions nearly every weekend of the year. What's more, the organization finds homes for animals on a continuing basis at the PAWS Adoption Center on North Clark Street.

“We are very pleased that Mayor Daley has endorsed PAWS by allowing animals from the city pound to be shown at our Adoption Center,” Fasseas says.

In 1999, PAWS programs resulted in over 500 cat adoptions and permanent homes for more than 300 dogs.

An active spay/neuter program will be necessary for Chicago to become a no-kill city, so Fasseas and her husband have donated 3,000 square feet in one of their banks for a low-cost clinic that will open in October.

“We're hoping that once the clinic is up and running the city will see how effective these operations are and will open a second spay/neuter clinic,” Fasseas says.

Meanwhile, through Angels with Tails tours and other initiatives, PAWS is making every effort to ensure that as many of Chicago's shelter animals as possible find good homes. 🐾

