
Taking the Animals to the People: The Furburbia Story



Best Friends
ANIMAL SOCIETY

by Aimee St. Arnaud, March 2003
Best Friends Animal Society
Kanab, UT 84741-5001
435-644-2001
www.bestfriends.org

About Best Friends

Best Friends is working with you – and with humane groups all across the country – to bring about a time when there are no more homeless pets.

The sanctuary at Angel Canyon, in the Golden Circle of southern Utah, is home, on any given day, to about 1,500 dogs, cats, and other animals from all over the country. Many of them need just a few weeks of special care before they're ready to go to good new homes. Others, who are older and sicker, or who have suffered extra trauma, find a home and a haven here, and are given loving care for the rest of their lives.

Best Friends manages a model No More Homeless Pets campaign, with shelters and humane groups statewide, to ensure that every healthy companion animal that's ever born can be guaranteed a loving, caring home.

And Best Friends reaches across the nation, helping humane groups, individual people, and entire communities to set up spay/neuter, shelter, foster, and adoption programs in their own neighborhoods, cities, and states.

The work of Best Friends is supported entirely through the donations of our members. Through the generous hearts and hands of people like you, we can ensure that animals who come into the care of Best Friends will never again be alone, hungry, sick, afraid, or in pain.

About No More Homeless Pets

Best Friends is working with people and humane organizations nationwide to bring about a time when there will be no more homeless pets. The No More Homeless Pets section of our website contains information about the nationwide No More Homeless Pets campaign. It offers current news, information on events and model programs, and practical how-to resources on a variety of topics – from advice on what one person can do to in-depth manuals for grassroots humane groups. For more information, visit our website at www.bestfriends.org.

In our home state of Utah, we have begun a program to bring an end to the killing of homeless animals in the state by the end of 2005. This cooperative effort involves animal welfare groups, animal control, veterinarians, and animal lovers across the state. We're happy to share our blueprint with people in other communities. For more information on No More Homeless Pets in Utah, visit www.utahpets.org.

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One of the top reasons given why people don't come to shelters to adopt is because they don't want to be sad or overwhelmed. They tend to have an image of shelters as prisons with dingy, depressing atmospheres. Regardless of how far this is from the truth, it is a difficult perception to shake.

So what are shelters to do? Take the animals to the people! A new, innovative concept is to take adoptable animals to areas with lots of people where potential adopters can get to know the animals in a fun, festive setting.

One location where that has been done with great success is Furburbia, an animal adoption center located in Cottonwood Mall in Salt Lake City, Utah.



Furburbia: the hip place to find true love.

Furburbia is part of the No More Homeless Pets in Utah program, a statewide campaign to end shelter deaths of healthy dogs and cats in Utah by 2005 through a combination of adoption and sterilization programs. The goal is to entice potential pet parents into the center to fall in love and adopt one of the featured pets.

What makes Furburbia unique is that it is the first center of its kind in the nation: By displaying rescued animals from a variety of animal welfare groups, it serves as a super adoption center for placing homeless pets with loving families.

Furburbia features adoptable animals from 30 adoption groups

from around the state. The brightly decorated 4,200-square-foot space features a fun and funky "retro" look designed to attract people of all kinds, including those who would like to adopt a pet but are saddened by the thought of visiting a shelter.

Nationwide, a mere 20 percent of pets are adopted from shelters. The rest are purchased from other sources, including pet stores, which are often located in shopping malls with easy access to large numbers of people who see adorable faces in the window and stop in.

Adoption centers like Furburbia can increase that percentage by showcasing the variety of wonderful pets available from shelters (including many pure-breds, which may cost hundreds of dollars at pet stores) and by having experienced staff help the public select the right pet for their lifestyle.

Because Furburbia is located in a mall, people often ask if it is a pet store and if there is concern about impulse adoptions. The format of Furburbia is intended to be similar to a pet store in that the center is conveniently located in the mall and offers an assortment of available animals. However, the concept is radically different from a pet store because of the source of the ani-

mals. Since all the animals are shelter animals in need of homes, Furburbia is helping to solve the pet overpopulation problem by exposing these animals to the public and offering them a second chance. Many pet stores buy their animals from massive breeding operations, which contribute to the problem by bringing more pets into an already overcrowded world.

Furthermore, many animals purchased from pet stores are not sterilized, whereas all animals adopted from Furburbia are sterilized before adoption.

Regarding the issue of impulse adoptions, Furburbia's Rescue Partners closely screen potential pet adopters just as they do at their shelters or adoption events. The screening process is no different at Furburbia. What is different is the novel adoption approach.

How Did Furburbia Get Started?

The first step was to find a suitable location. A company called J.P. Realty donated the 4,200-square-foot space, including utilities, which were paid by the mall for the first two years. (Beginning in 2003, General Growth, which now owns the mall, is charging a nominal fee of \$200 per month for rent and utilities.)

But the store did not come fully decorated and ready for animals. It was an empty storefront with carpeting, which for sanitary reasons would not work well.

So, the No More Homeless Pets staff got their creative juices flowing, and started planning a colorful, festive atmosphere. To make sure that they were creating a pleasant, positive atmosphere for the animals as well as people, the staff researched cleaning products, flooring options, shelter protocols, and kennel brands by scouring the Internet and interviewing shelter managers and staff.

The staff collected hip furnishings from thrift stores; they hung colorful banners and painted the walls in bright colors; and they added dog kennels and cat condos to complete the transformation of the empty space. Using volunteers to help with construction saved a lot of money and resulted in a greater sense of pride and ownership for the employees and volunteers who helped out. From start to finish, the remodeling period took six weeks.

Getting Shelters to Participate

Many local groups were aware that Furburbia was being developed because they were already working collaboratively with the No More Homeless Pets in Utah program, sponsored by Maddie's Fund (see sidebar).

Before the opening of Furburbia, letters of participation were sent to local rescue groups and shelters with a list of management rules and policies. This letter was an opportunity for people to comment and make suggestions. As a result of feedback from participating groups (called Rescue Partners), some policies were changed to accommodate their needs.

One key element to participating in Furburbia is that Rescue Partners are not allowed to make negative remarks about another Rescue Partner or dis-

About Maddie's Fund

Maddie's Fund, the Pet Rescue Foundation (www.maddiesfund.org), is a family foundation endowed through the generosity of Cheryl and Dave Duffield, PeopleSoft founder and board chairman. The foundation is helping to finance the creation of a no-kill nation. The first step is to help create programs that guarantee loving homes for all adoptable (healthy) shelter dogs and cats. The next step will be to save sick and injured pets in animal shelters. Maddie's Fund is named after the family's beloved miniature schnauzer who passed away in 1997.

suade potential applicants from adopting from a fellow Rescue Partner. Respect is crucial to a positive working relationship. Because respect is very important, any Rescue Partner group that consistently arrives late or consistently removes their animals early (before the shift is over) may be suspended from Furburbia for not less than one rotation of the Furburbia calendar. Any group that does not fill their assigned kennels and/or condos may also be removed from the Furburbia calendar for one rotation. The goal of the partnership is to find homes for rescued animals, so the animals must be available for scheduled shifts in order for this to happen.

Working together has allowed the groups to get to know each other and develop an understanding of each other's goals. While not every group shares the same philosophies, they have learned to focus on the areas of common ground rather than on differences.

How Furburbia Works

Management. Two paid staff, a manager and an assistant manager, who report to No More Homeless Pets in Utah, are in charge of making Furburbia run smoothly and scheduling the Rescue Partners.

Policies. With input from each of the Rescue Partners, the managers determine the policies for all areas, including adoptions, cleaning and sanitation, merchandise, vaccinations, and responsibilities. It is the responsibility of each Rescue Partner to make sure their staff and volunteers understand and adhere to these policies.

Scheduling. The manager is in charge of scheduling Rescue Partners and creating the monthly schedule based on the needs of the partners. Because weekends are the busiest times (and when most partners can come), they are the most sought-after time slot. Weekend times are divided equally among groups so that they usually have either one Saturday or one Sunday a month.

Each Rescue Partner is required to have staff or volunteers onsite during their shifts to do adoptions and care for the animals. The Humane Society of Utah is one of several groups fortunate enough to have a paid staff member. Because they have paid staff, the Humane Society routinely brings animals on weekdays, when other volunteer Rescue Partners are unavailable. It is very important to have adoptable animals at Furburbia during business hours. Without the Humane Society of Utah and animal control agencies bringing animals during the week, Furburbia would not be able to operate seven days a week.

Hours. Furburbia is open seven days a week from noon to 7 pm, Monday–Saturday, and noon to 5 pm on Sunday.

Funding. In addition to Maddie's Fund, Furburbia is funded through merchandising, donations, and a share of all adoption fees, all of which offset operating costs. Furburbia keeps \$7 from each adoption fee. In 2003, No More Homeless Pets in Utah staff will put a greater emphasis on selling merchandise at Furburbia. They believe this has been an underutilized funding source.

Year Three: Projected Expenditures

Renovations	\$6,500
Phone	1,620
Operating supplies and equipment	3,500
Janitorial services	5,500
Maintenance	1,500
Staff salaries	39,000
Payroll taxes	3,725
Worker's compensation	632
Rent*	2,400
Miscellaneous**	1,565
<hr/> Total:	<hr/> \$65,941

*The rent amount reflects an entire year. (We only paid rent part of the year.) Rent is actually the greater of \$200 or 5% of gross merchandise sales. We currently only sell between \$1,200 and \$2,500 in merchandise a month, so we end up paying \$200 a month.

**We just started paying our own utilities, so we don't yet have a good indication of what that will cost. The first month, we spent just over \$300 but that is most likely higher than our average will be, since it was a cold month.

The cost to run Furburbia annually ranges from \$50,000 to \$75,000 (see the box at left). This cost includes supplies, laundry and once-a-week cleaning service, and phone service. It does not include advertising, which is an additional cost. Operating costs will vary, depending on how many days a store is open. When Furburbia first opened, it was only open Thursday through Sunday, so it was less expensive. Now that it is open seven days a week, 50 weeks a year, the costs have increased. But so have the number of adoptions, which is the goal of the store.

How Adoptions Work

Responsibilities of participating shelters. A representative from each Rescue Partner must be present at Furburbia during their scheduled time. Each partner brings 1–3 volunteers, although No More Homeless Pets in Utah can provide volunteers if they are notified in advance.

Furburbia provides cat cages, dog kennels, water dishes, cat litter, and litter boxes. Leashes for in-house use are available, but all groups are responsible for providing leashes and ID tags for animals being adopted. Furburbia has some inexpensive collars, ID tags, and slip leads available for Rescue Partners to purchase. Food is not provided, but is available for purchase if necessary. Ideally, animals should be fed before they

come. Rescue Partners must fill out a checklist of items completed before they can leave for the night. (See the checklist on page 14.)

Unadopted animals. They are returned to the shelters or rescue groups for another chance to be adopted. Dogs must go back to the shelters each night, but cats can stay overnight if the same rescue group will be returning the next day.

Transportation. Each Rescue Partner is responsible for transportation of their animals to Furburbia.

Adoption fees. The adoption fee for dogs and puppies is \$85 and the fee for cats and kittens is \$75. No More Homeless Pets in Utah keeps \$7 from each adoption fee, which helps to offset Furburbia's operating costs. At the end of each week, a check (minus the \$7 per-adoption fee) is written to each Rescue Partner.

Adoption package. The adoption package varies slightly, depending on the group from which the animal is adopted. All adoptions include the animal's sterilization surgery, the first set of vaccinations, and a collar with an ID tag. Some adoptions may also include a microchip ID implant.

Adoption contracts and policies. Rescue Partners supply their own adoption applications and contracts. Furburbia has created one adoption fee to



A volunteer plays with the kitties at Furburbia.

streamline the process and lessen confusion for the public, but each group maintains their own individual procedures.

Busiest times. Weekends bring the highest number of adoptions and number of people visiting Furburbia.

Cleaning and exercising animals. Rescue Partners are responsible for the cleaning and care of any animal they bring to Furburbia. Dogs are walked often in a designated area outside the mall and accidents are cleaned up immediately. Partners who leave cats overnight are expected to arrive early to clean litter boxes before Furburbia is open to the public. At the end of every day, each Rescue Partner is responsible for cleaning any kennels, cages, or condos that they have used. Dog kennels are swept and mopped. Cat cages and condos are cleaned and sanitized for future use. Bowls and litter boxes are also cleaned and sanitized.

Number of animals. Furburbia has 16 dogs runs, five of which can house two dogs. There are 30 cat towers and one large cat enclosure. On a busy weekend, Furburbia typically houses 30 to 40 cats.

Barking and odors. If an animal has an accident, the area is immediately sanitized. To prevent odors from offending the public as they view animals, solid animal waste is discarded in a trashcan with a locking lid in the back room. Barking is generally not a problem, because Furburbia has glass doors that help silence sounds and dogs are given distractions such as chew toys, treats, and walks.

Sterilization and vaccinations. Every animal at Furburbia must be spayed or neutered and must be current on vaccinations. Puppies and kittens must be at least eight weeks old. If a Rescue Partner brings an animal without current vaccinations, the partner will be asked to remove the animal from Furburbia. This rule is necessary for the health and safety of all the animals.

Volunteers. Individual groups bring staff or volunteers to take care of their animals, but many additional volunteers are always needed to help with the Furburbia adoption process.

Preventing disease. The management has consulted with experienced shelter managers to discuss cage and kennel sterilization techniques and other methods of preventing the spread of disease. The floors have been sealed and bleach is used to clean the kennels and cages between animals. There is also plexiglass between the kennels.

Returns/surrenders. If someone wants to surrender an animal, he or she must be directed to a shelter. Mall security will be notified immediately if anyone attempts to abandon an animal at Furburbia. Return adoptions are not accepted at Furburbia unless the Rescue Partner has made prior arrangements with Furburbia management.

Training. A dog trainer teaches a class at Furburbia after hours. The rates for the class are reduced if the animal is adopted through Furburbia. This training helps address any animal behavioral issues.

Marketing Strategies

Getting the word out to the public about your program and available animals is crucial to the success of your efforts. No More Homeless Pets in Utah staff have come up with a variety of ad campaigns that work. They also constantly evaluate and update their message to keep it fresh.

For example, the NMHP in Utah staff learned a while ago that only 20 percent of animals adopted nationwide are from shelters. One of the reasons, they figured, is that many people who want purebred animals assume that shelters only have nondescript mutts. To publicize the fact that one in three shelter animals is a purebred (and they are all unique), the staff decided to develop a fun ad campaign directed toward those people with misperceptions about shelter animals.

The following ad features “Jake” (on the left), a 100-percent purebred basset hound who was purchased for \$600 at a pet store. He’s a purebred, but he’s one of a dozen at the pet store. On the right is “Jack,” who was adopted from Furburbia for \$75. He is one of a kind – 90-percent basset hound and 10 percent everything else. The ad captures the benefits of adopting an animal from a shelter instead of purchasing one from a pet store.



Oftentimes, the staff like to capitalize on existing events and holidays by giving them an added “animal” twist. Here are just a few of the fun events developed to promote adoptions:

Creative Adoption Events

St Patrick’s Day. Instead of celebrating St. Patrick’s Day, Furburbia offered a month-long celebration of St. Patrick’s Day, with a free “pot of gold” filled with surprises for each cat adopted. The flyer featured pictures of cats with four-leaf clovers around them. The cats wore green hats and had Irish names such as O’Malley and Lucky (for luck of the Irish).

Labrador Day. During Labor Day weekend, Furburbia and other Rescue Partners celebrated Labrador Day, with Labs, Lab mixes and feline “Labs-at-heart” available for adoption at the special price of just \$50. Each Lab adoption included a Lab tennis ball, which all Lab people know is a definite “must-have.” Ten Labs and Lab mixes found homes the first time this “howliday” event was held, and an additional 11 dogs and cats were adopted, too.



The Fonz

This promotion was chosen because Utah's shelters are chock-full of Labs and Lab mixes. Furburbia wanted to spread the word that you don't have to go to a breeder to get a Labrador – you can just head on down to your local shelter.

Milestone Celebrations

Any achievement is worthy of celebration, and the staff at No More Homeless Pets in Utah make sure they recognize successes with a special event. In addition to recognizing the efforts of your staff and volunteers, these events can be newsworthy and bring attention to your program. When Furburbia completed its second year with more than 1,300 adoptions (an increase of 18 percent from the previous year), they held a "Happy Days reunion" and press conference. They dubbed one dog "the Fonz," designated a feline Richie Cunningham, and named two huskies in love Joanie and Chachi. The media loved the event and showed up to provide coverage.

Opening Another Store

Because the first store has been such a huge success, No More Homeless Pets in Utah will be opening a second Furburbia in Park City (15 miles from Salt Lake City) in late spring 2003.



Virtual Tour of Furburbia

The following is a virtual tour of Furburbia. As you enter the store, you will notice that everything is very colorful and inviting. You will also find experienced staff and volunteers eager to help you choose the right pet for you.

Merchandise Area

Here you will find everything for your newly adopted friend – from leashes to toys to carriers. All funds generated through the merchandising area are used to cover the costs of running Furburbia and finding more homes for needy pets.



Cat Adoption Area

There are 30 cat condos with one or two cats per condo. Each group is given several condos to use during their scheduled shift. The number of cats on display should be limited, since it's overwhelming if there are too many cats to choose from. An attractive display area with plenty of space for the cats is important. As you can see from the photo, these cats are pretty comfortable while waiting for a new home!



Cat Tower

This wonderful cat tree was created and donated by Salt Lake Cathouse (salt_lake_cathouse@yahoo.com). Complete with catnip, it's a virtual kitty Shangri-La! There are 6-8 cats in here at any given time. Volunteers, who must be at least 14 years old, come to groom and socialize the cats.



Cat Cuddling Area

Dubbed "The Cat's Meow," this area was still being completed when the picture was taken, but it will soon be a nice area for adopters to spend some time cuddling with cats before deciding on adoption.



Dogs

This area has 16 kennels. There is generally only one dog per kennel but if dogs get along particularly well, they can be doubled up. There is a profile card for each animal. These guys are enjoying a nice afternoon nap.



Dog Bonding Areas

Dubbed "The Barkyard," these fun and colorful gated areas are for potential adopters to spend some time bonding with a dog off-leash before making a decision to adopt.



Internet Connection

If potential adopters don't see their new best friend at Furburbia that day, they can log on to Pet Ark (www.pet-ark.com), which has pictures and descriptions of available animals from shelters across the state. The goal of this Internet hook-up is to take the extra step in helping the adopter find the perfect match.

Goals and Results

The current goal of Furburbia is to adopt out 40 animals per week. The store aims for two adoptions per day Monday through Wednesday (which tend to be slower days) and 12–14 adoptions on Saturday. In 2002–03 (Year Three), Furburbia has set a goal of adopting out 2,000 animals. Here are the adoption statistics for Furburbia so far:

Year	Dates	Number of Adoptions	Days Per Week Furburbia Was Open
One	July 2000–July 2001	1,095	Open 4 days a week
Two	July 2001–July 2002	1,300	Open 4 days a week for 3/4 of the year and 7 days a week for the last quarter
Three	July 2002–July 2003	1,003*	7 days a week

**At the six-month mark: end of December 2002*

The annual goal will be increased in Years Four and Five. Because of Furburbia, thousands of animals have been placed in loving homes.

Creating a Furburbia-Type Store in Your Community

Almost every community has a mall that would be a good location for a Furburbia-type store. If your community doesn't have an inside mall, look into a strip mall location. The store doesn't have to be in the busiest mall in town, where gaining a storefront can be very difficult and expensive. It can be located in a mall with fewer tenants. In fact, Furburbia and other similar programs have actually become a positive draw for malls struggling to attract customers.

Once you've decided on a potential location, approach the mall's management. Find out who owns the mall and ask to speak to the leasing agent. It helps if you have a volunteer or staff member who has a real-estate background or a connection with the management (perhaps someone who works for a company that does promotions or advertising with the mall or provides services to the mall). If possible, set up an appointment to meet with the leasing agent. Sometimes the leasing agent is an out-of-town company, so you can also ask to speak to the local community events person for the mall. At the meeting, talk about the following:

- Explain the concept and how Furburbia is run.
- Highlight the benefits of such a program and explain how it can draw people to the mall.
- Talk about the free advertising the mall will be receiving through your promotions and marketing.
- Mention that you will be aggressively seeking press coverage at the store (which means free publicity for the mall).



- Address any concerns up front, such as barking dogs and possible smells. These can be easily addressed with proper protocols.
- Promote the fact that you are a registered 501(c)3 nonprofit, so the donation of space can serve as a tax write-off for the mall.
- Show them pictures of Furburbia to demonstrate what a success it can be and how professional it can look.

Offer to do a “pilot project” on a weekend or during the holidays to show how it would work. If the mall is happy with the results, then you can discuss long-term donated space.

The ideal option is to have the mall agree to provide a storefront at no cost. However, if this is absolutely not a possibility and no malls in town are able to accommodate you, another option might be to negotiate a six-month trial period at no cost to see if it would be worth it to pay a reduced rate of rent after the trial period ends. This is dependent, of course, upon your finances and whether you feel enough adoptions will be done to make it worthwhile.

Be aware that even if the mall agrees to give you free space, there is no guarantee that this will be a permanent situation. Furburbia recently began paying a nominal fee for rent and utilities on their space when the mall came under new management.

Once you have secured a space, you can work on setting up the store. A good way to keep the costs down is to get as much as possible donated. Try contacting local lumber companies, paint stores, designers, and home improvement stores to ask if they will donate items. Offer to put their name on a plaque in the store honoring their donation. Furburbia further reduced costs by purchasing furniture from a thrift shop. The furniture was not only cheap, but it was also “hip.”

Cutting costs does not mean that you have to cut creativity. There are many creative ways to highlight the wonderful animals in your care. As shelter and rescue organizations start competing with pet stores, they need to outdo the pet stores when it comes to marketing. Visit any pet store and you will find lots of bright colors and adorable animals with every merchandising item they need right next to them. While we hope pet stores will learn from our example and partner with a rescue group rather than selling animals, we can take a page out of their book when it comes to marketing.

We encourage you to take a page out of Furburbia’s book and start a similar program in your community. Furburbia may be the first store of its kind, but we hope others will follow after everyone sees how successful it can be.

Checkout Form

Rescue Partners: Please complete and check off each of the following items before leaving Furburbia.

- _____ 1. Sweep out all kennels that you used during your event.
- _____ 2. Mop all kennels that you used during your event.
- _____ 3. Remember to clean corners of kennels and under kennel bars with paper towels when necessary.
- _____ 4. Spray down and wipe out all crates that you used.
- _____ 5. Spray down and wipe out all cat towers that you used. (Be sure to remove all tiny pieces of litter from the base.)
- _____ 6. Wash all dishes that you used.
- _____ 7. Wash all litter pans that you used.
- _____ 8. Wipe down plastic kennel Plexiglas.
- _____ 9. If you make a mess, clean it up before you leave (that includes tables, bathroom, and break area).

Rescue Partner Signature

Date

Furburbia Representative Signature

Date