



**FOR SEASONAL DISTRIBUTION
Holiday Public Service Message**

Assets: [PHOTOS](#) courtesy of Gregory Morris
See suggested captions below

This seasonal message was shared with United Spay Alliance for broader distribution and adapted for nonprofit outreach.

Home for the Holidays

There are many ideas for holiday gifts, from insipid to inspired. One of the best would be to give a shelter dog or cat a forever home, but only if you have room in your heart and your life. One of the worst gift ideas would be a surprise pet. That adorable fuzzy face under the tree or next to the menorah will live another decade or more.

By all means adopt if you can! Just do it as a thoroughly considered commitment, not as spontaneous gesture. Live animals are not merely things to be given for surprise and delight. They have feelings, emotions, and needs.

If you cannot adopt, please consider fostering, volunteering at a facility, or donating money, food and cleaning supplies, as well as old clothing, towels, and blankets. Shelters and foster families go through vast amounts of food, wipes, towels, and bedding. Whatever new you got for the holidays, the old stuff can have a second life caring for a critter.

Not to put a downer on the festive season, but the animals in well-run shelters and with foster families are the lucky ones. Hundreds of thousands of dogs and cats languish at under-funded facilities around the country. In North Carolina, for instance, the problem is particularly acute in the Southeast, where [Who Will Let the Dogs Out](#) (WWLDO) focuses its efforts.

WWLDO visits struggling shelters and pounds bringing support, guidance, and connection to resources not just for the animals but for the people who care for them. In just a few years volunteer teams have visited almost 200 facilities in 16 states and worked hand in hand with more than a thousand animal-care professionals and volunteers.

“Advocacy starts with awareness,” says co-founder and board president Cara Achterberg. “If your local shelter is publicly funded, you have the right to ask questions. Find out how many animals they take in, what their outcomes are, and what services they offer. If the answers concern you, speak up. Contact local officials, write letters to the editor, or attend public meetings.”

Achterberg has written a [compelling book](#) about the challenges and hopes for homeless pets. At just \$20, it makes a great stocking stuffer.

For all the heroic and too-often heartbreaking work done by shelters, rescuers, and foster family, the crisis of unwanted animals will only worsen if spaying and neutering does not become more widely enacted. [United Spay Alliance](#) is a national animal welfare organization dedicated exclusively to promoting affordable, accessible, and timely spay and neuter services as the solution to the crisis of cat and dog homelessness.

Giving Tuesday is gone, but the needs of the many remain. Animals cannot advocate for themselves, and the true measure of any society is how it treats its most vulnerable. Through the season of caring, and all through the new year hold these principles in your heart and mind:

- **Adopt if you can**, and from a shelter or rescue group rather than buying. But only after careful consideration. Never give pets as gifts.
- **Spaying and neutering** is the only long-term solution to pet overpopulation. Fixed pets live longer, healthier lives.
- **Volunteer**. If you can't adopt, foster. If you can't foster, volunteer at a shelter, even just to take a dog for a walk or help staff an adoption table event.
- **Donate**. Every dollar helps save animals' lives. Give food, cleaning supplies, old clothes, sheets, towels, and blankets.

PHOTOS:

[Opener image](#): Rufus, a mixed-breed adopted from the Raleigh-Durham, NC-area foster organization Independent Animal Rescue.

[Second Image](#): Staffordshire terriers and other "pitbull" breeds have been falsely maligned. They have strong personalities as well as strong bodies, are gentle, playful, and loyal. Individual dogs may be aggressive due to abuse or neglect, but there are no dangerous breeds.