



PET TALK

Welcome to *Pet Talk*, a periodic report of happenings at the Flathead County Animal Shelter.

Did you know that the Shelter now has a new manager? When longtime manager Cliff Bennett retired at the end of March, he turned over the reins (or is it “leashes?”) to Austin Hicks.

Austin comes to the job after more than 15 years in law enforcement, which is a great public service background for the work done by the Shelter each day.

In addition to using industry Best Practices in caring for homeless dogs and cats, Hicks is responsible for various aspects of people management as well. For example, local taxpayers and animal lovers should be proud of the fact that the Shelter provides exemplary care with less

staff and less budget than at comparably sized shelters in the state.

Another management challenge comes when interacting with the public. Some are happy experiences, as with new pet adoptions, and some are very sad, such as when housing shortages cause people to relinquish beloved pets.



One frequently asked question is whether Flathead is a so called No Kill shelter. Manager Hicks says that the term is somewhat of a misnomer: Most professionally managed shelters in the U.S. occasionally must provide humane euthanasia for incurable sick animals. (Like many pet owners must do.)

But rest assured that the shelter goes out of its way to save every homeless pet that comes its way.

Nonetheless, local animal lovers are worried that the valley’s rapidly expanding population and resultant increase in homeless pets

might someday lead to Big City euthanasia policies.

According to the ASPCA, more than 6 million homeless pets enter rescue shelters in the U.S. each year—all hoping to find a Forever Home (or is it a Fur-ever home?). Locally, the problem is only expected to worsen because the Kalispell area was recently rated as the nation’s fastest growing micropolitan area.

Of course, you can help make a dent in those homeless numbers by adopting pets and by spreading the word among friends and neighbors.

By the way, did you know about the Senior Pet Voucher program sponsored by Flathead Shelter Friends? The free voucher pays up to \$250 toward veterinary care for 7+ year-old dogs and cats that are adopted at the county shelter.

When asked if he had any pets at home, Shelter Manager Austin Hicks replied: “Our Catahoula Leopard Dog is not only a loving family member but also happy to have her lifetime Flathead County dog license!”

In closing, please
remember the motto *Opt to
Adopt* when deciding to get
your next family pet!

For more information,
please visit the Flathead
County Animal Shelter
website at
[https://flathead.mt.gov/dep
artment-directory/animal](https://flathead.mt.gov/department-directory/animal).

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