

Sharon Rode started Save Our Strays Fort Bend in 2004 and has fostered and facilitated the adoptions of thousands of animals since



Photo by Andres Quintero



Cats just like Miles can't wait to find the purrfect family



Hannah gives a grin hoping she will soon be adopted



Bear is just one of the many beautiful pets at Save Our Strays looking for his forever home

Photo by Andres Quintero

Save Our Strays

A Fort Bend nonprofit group dedicated to helping stray animals

Written by Tonya Ellis | Select Photos Courtesy of Janis Laughlin

A chance encounter at a foreclosed home 20 years ago led Sharon Rode on a lifelong mission to save stray animals. The Fort Bend resident was helping her husband Mark in their commercial lawn service business, when they came upon the empty house. “We found two dogs in a backyard, chained, with no food or water,” she recalls. “Their teeth were almost ground down to the gum line, because they were trying to get free.” The Rodes rescued the Airedale terrier mixes and nursed them back to health. Two sisters later adopted the dogs.

The Road to Salvation

Since then, Rode has fostered and facilitated the adoptions of thousands of animals. In 2004, she founded the nonprofit group Save Our Strays Fort Bend. The organization seeks to educate the public on spaying, neutering, and vaccinating animals, along with providing foster care for animals sent to animal control, until they can be placed in loving homes. The organization also raises money for veterinary care services for stray pets and operates a no-kill shelter in Fort Bend, where animals will not be euthanized.

Through her work with Save Our Strays, Rode hopes to see happy endings for all of Fort Bend’s stray animals. “People just live their lives,” she says. “They have no idea how many animals are impounded and euthanized every day in our area. It’s sad.”

The Lost Puppy

Hundreds of animals each year are taken in by Fort Bend area animal control facilities. If they aren’t claimed within three to five days, they are put to sleep. Save Our Strays informs

the public about the different area shelters they can visit in the event of a lost pet to ensure this doesn’t happen. Animal control groups in the Fort Bend area include Sugar Land Animal Services, Missouri City Animal Control, and Fort Bend County Animal Services, which is located in Rosenberg. “You can talk to people and find tons that don’t know these animal control facilities exist,” says Rode. “They aren’t going to know where to go if they lost their pet.”

Identification Is Crucial

It’s important that owners provide proper identification for their pets, stresses Rode. Save Our Strays encourages owners to have microchip detecting devices inserted under their pet’s skin. If a lost pet with a chip is scanned, its owners’ contact information can be accessed. “We’ve seen cases where someone goes on vacation and their pet gets lost and has not been microchipped,” says Rode. “If they have a tag on that has your number or your vet’s number, they are going to call and be able to reach you.”

Finding Homes for Strays

The image of the stray dog or cat as a rascally bandit can make it hard to place stray animals in homes. “A lot of people have misconceptions about a dog that’s at the pound,” explains Rode. “I think most people think that they are aggressive, diseased, or unsocialized. That is so far from the truth.” The poor economy and people’s desire for convenience are other factors that keep them from adopting pets, Rode adds. “Owners are turning them in left and right with this economy,” she says. “If you turn your dog into the pound, they will be euthanized that day. It’s sad to say, but it’s true. People don’t want to be inconvenienced.”



Save Our Strays hosts adoptions at Petco stores in Sugar Land and Missouri City on Sundays



Winkie lounges in the grass as he hopes to be adopted

Dana Sterry cuddles with Laverne at Petco



Photo by Andres Quintero

Home Sweet Home

Save Our Strays places pets not only in Fort Bend, but nationwide, with most outside adoptions coming from the Northeast. Out-of-town adopting families must fill out an application, submit personal references, and pay an adoption fee. Pets are flown to their owners through a service called Mutts for Rescue. Locally, Save Our Strays holds Sunday adoptions at Petco stores in Sugar Land and Missouri City.

Recently, families were found for Peanut, a white Terrier from Fort Bend, who Rode had in foster care for three months, and Sammie, a friendly, silky terrier. Dog adoptions are more common than cat adoptions in Fort Bend, but there are many felines in the area that also need loving homes.

How Can You Help?

Rode encourages those who want to save Fort Bend County's stray animals to contact the county commissioner's office and express a concern. The only way to have tax dollars earmarked for a facility for stray pets is to ask for it. "They have the money," she says. "They're building all these beautiful buildings in Richmond that cost millions and millions of dollars, and we're killing all these animals."

Save Our Strays can also use donations, volunteers to help raise funds, and people to foster and adopt animals. "These animals deserve to find a home," says Rode. "They don't deserve to die. Fort Bend County is so large, and it's growing so much. We are one of the richest counties in the nation. There's no reason why these animals should be dying." SLM

TONYA ELLIS has three children who would like to adopt a pet.

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Save Our Strays is always in need of donations, volunteers, and people to foster animals like Big Benji

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Noah



Bandy



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Visit saveourstraysfortbend.org and download an adoption application. Once completed, email, fax, or mail it back to the shelter, and upon approval, a representative will arrange a meeting with you and the animal you are interested in adopting. For a complete list of animals available for adoption through Save Our Strays, visit sosfortbend.petfinder.com