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more than just a pretty face: pet adoption 101

by georgia brown

AMONG THE MOST PROMINENT CHILDHOOD MEMORIES IN ONE'S MIND ARE THOSE OF A BELOVED PET. One that followed alongside while you rode your bicycle, jumped for joy as the school bus approached at 3:30, and comforted you after Mom and Dad learned of a disappointing report card. The bond between man and pet is powerful; so great, in fact, that pets are considered part of the family. With spring around the corner many families consider adoption.

Craig Buffington, D.V.M. of the Stonebrook Veterinary Clinic in Frisco, recommends, first and foremost, discussing the possibility of adoption because an addition to the family is a long-term commitment. He believes everyone should take into account the size of the pet, costs associated with ownership, the environment they have to offer, lifestyle, and history of allergies. Dr. Buffington encourages families to be realistic about their expectations. For example, it is probably not advisable to adopt a 150-pound dog if one's living space is limited to a 500 square foot efficiency apartment. Once a family takes the aforementioned factors into consideration, visiting the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), is a superb place to begin.

The local SPCA, also known as the Collin County Animal Care Center in McKinney, has all sorts of pets to offer. At any

given moment, they have cats, dogs, and guinea pigs. Angela Wallace, manager of the center, concurs with Dr. Buffington that potential pet owners should be aware of their lifestyle when choosing a pet, but she also asks that people keep an open mind when it comes to adoption. "Generally, families have an idea of what they want in a pet with regard to color, size, and breed preference," she claims. While a Westminster Kennel Club Champion is highly regarded, Wallace encourages people not to judge a pet by looks alone and allow fate to play a role in the matter. She recommends determining which animals favorably respond to them; that is, with whom they are most compatible. What's more, Dr. Buffington contends, "most often mixed breeds are healthier and tend to live longer because they are not genetically predisposed to life threatening illnesses most purebred animals face." Also, he maintains these pets "typically have great dispositions and are simply grateful for being rescued." They want a caring family, food and water, and a place to call home.

However, in the event the usual cat or dog is not of interest, the SPCA, on occasion, rivals Old McDonald's Farm with birds, chickens, geese, goats, horses, iguanas, pot-bellied pigs, and turtles. A trip to the SPCA gives families an opportunity to see the animals, visit with them, and determine compatibility. And, although owning a pet clearly provides companionship, they also offer a certain degree of protection and could significantly improve one's health by possibly lowering blood pressure.

So, once a potential owner makes the decision to adopt and a pet is chosen, the SPCA, for a nominal fee based on the pet's weight, provides age-appropriate vaccinations, a medical record of the blood tests performed, a leash, an identification/rabies vaccination tag, and a microchip that ensures the pet's return to the rightful owner in the event it is lost. All that remains is to take the pet home and enjoy the new addition to the family. And, know upon awakening in the morning, while wearing ten-year-old flannel pajamas and donning a hairdo reminiscent of Rod Stewart's, a faithful pet loves his or her owner unconditionally – morning breath and all.

Georgia Brown is a Dallas-based freelance writer.



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