



# Pet Talk

## *The Giving Season*

Welcome to *Pet Talk*, an occasional column about homeless pets and related topics. Today we're focusing on pets and the holidays.

Most people would probably agree that our pets are true gifts of nature. In short, they're the "gifts that keep on giving!" But not all gifts are created equal. For example, although pets are often given as holiday presents, sometimes the recipients didn't actually want pets to begin with! Although well-intentioned folks sometimes impulsively give such presents, careful consideration should always be given to the recipient's desires and their ability to provide long-term, loving pet care.

That is, impulse giving might be appropriate and fun when presenting a new sweater to a spouse, but not so good when it comes to a sentient, relatively long-lived animal like a dog or cat. Unfortunately, the inevitable fallout occurs shortly thereafter—when unwanted pets are surrendered to animal shelters or abandoned on the streets.

Case in point: Easter bunnies! Although thousands are impulsively given as adorable presents each year, most end up abused, abandoned or dead soon afterwards. According to the Humane Society of the U.S., 95 percent don't live to see their first birthday even though domesticated rabbits can live for 10 years or more.

The Vet24 website gives the following reasons to avoid such impulses:

- 1) The recipient might not have the money to care for the pet;
- 2) The recipient might not have the time or energy;
- 3) The gift might not be age-appropriate;
- 4) The recipient might not have wanted that kind of pet;
- 5) It implies that pets are disposable playthings.

Interestingly, national advocacy groups often have varying views on pet gifting. Whereas the Humane Society of the U.S. recommends avoiding the practice altogether, the ASPCA condones

it if both giver and recipient understand and are well prepared for the responsibilities of pet ownership.

Although some animal shelters support pet gifting to help reduce intake numbers, many discourage the practice because, again, recently gifted pets are often surrendered shortly after the initial holiday excitement wears off and pet care reality sets in.

Locally, what about the Flathead County Animal Shelter? Manager Austin Hicks recently said: “I would say we are neutral on the issue. I wouldn’t promote gifting animals to people who may not be ready to have one, but if someone is ready for an animal, it isn’t a negative thing to gift one. In fact, my own personal dog was a Christmas present from Santa for our girls all those years ago!”

Indeed, there’s nothing quite like a happy new pet when family circumstances are right. So whether it’s a holiday present or not, we heartily recommend adopting a grateful homeless dog or cat whenever you’re ready. There are always *plenty* of great choices available at Flathead County Animal Shelter so please schedule your Meet ‘n Greet today! You can also help spread the word among family and friends in rapidly growing Flathead County.

Speaking of gifts, our volunteer group Flathead Shelter Friends hopes to see you at the always fun Whitefish Christmas Stroll. Indeed, it’s one of our major fundraising efforts—where generous donors give not only precious dollars but also heartfelt encouragement to our efforts. Indeed, 100 percent of each dollar goes toward helping homeless pets at Flathead County Animal Shelter. So, many thanks to all and we hope to meet you there!



By the way, did you know about the **Senior Pet Voucher** offered by Flathead Shelter Friends? The free voucher previously was \$250, but now pays \$350 toward veterinary care for adopted cats and dogs who are 7+ years old (and for some pets with special medical needs).

For more information, please contact Flathead County Animal Shelter, phone number (406) 758-1310, or visit the website at <https://flathead.mt.gov/department-directory/animal>.

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***Personal donations are always appreciated! For more information, see [www.flatheadshelterfriends.org](http://www.flatheadshelterfriends.org)***