

## HISTORY OF THE ANIMAL CARE CENTER (ACC) OF ST. JOHN

### The Beginnings

In the 1960's, several island residents joined together to address both the increasing number of wild dog packs running the hillsides and the many feral cats, sick and starving, who foraged for food in the island dumpsters. Another major issue was the lack of public spaying and neutering awareness and the consequent burgeoning population of homeless companion animals. Individual St. Johnians had taken to bagging puppies and kittens and disposing of them, often alive, in the island dumpsters. The initial group of animal advocates addressed these issues as best they could for a number of years.

In 1989—shortly after Hurricane Hugo which left even more animals in greater need—Gina Burns, a full-time resident, attempted in earnest to organize animal advocates into a formal group. There were few resources available to this group and no central shelter to which animal caregivers could take abandoned animals. There was no veterinarian on the island, although one or two veterinarians from St. Thomas began to visit St. John weekly to offer medical assistance. Individuals personally attempted to save some of the many animals in pain and suffering on St. John, but no formal organization existed.

The early years of what would become the Animal Care Center were incredibly challenging due to disparate cultural attitudes, lack of funding, shortage of supplies, and absence of professional assistance. St. John had not yet become a significant tourist destination and the infrastructure was underdeveloped. Since no physical shelter had yet been established, individual animal advocates housed injured, abused, and abandoned animals in their own homes. Personal phone numbers were distributed for citizens to call when animal emergencies were discovered.

Gina Burns' house became a dog shelter while Cherie Mulder and Maia Mongie's homes became cat shelters. Unofficial meetings were held at a small

Cruz Bay restaurant, “Luscious Licks.” The welfare of the free-roaming island donkeys became another issue of concern but as there was no veterinarian on island, sterilization of donkeys was not possible. Those concerned with the widespread suffering of St. John’s animals simply did their best individually, often in crisis mode.

Small island dance parties were sometimes held to raise money for animals in need. Some animal advocates donated funds for food and medical supplies. Sometimes, small bake sales were held in front of Connections, an island communications center in Cruz Bay owned by Cid Hamling. It was here that adoptions took place and travel for animals to St. Thomas for medical care was coordinated. Sick or injured animals needed to be caught and taken to St. Thomas by ferry. They needed to be escorted as the ferry services refused to accept unaccompanied animals and, in general, have remained hostile to having companion animals on board their boats. Escorting needy animals to St. Thomas was a time-consuming effort, especially on an island where every task takes four times the normal time and energy to complete. Only on Tuesdays when Dr. Saunders or on Wednesdays when Dr. Andy Williamson came from St. Thomas was veterinary care available locally.

## Shelter Plans

During all this time, Gina Burns searched for the means to establish a permanent shelter for St. John animals in need. She located a small patch of land near Cruz Bay that was designated as Government property. She solicited the local Government for use of this patch of land and proposed to purchase a used container to place on it, converting the container as best she could into a shelter. Containers full of merchandise or building supplies come to the islands all the time, and often they are simply abandoned. Consequently, Gina believed that with a grant of land use from Government and a free or inexpensive container to place there, an identifiable shelter could be established. Government promised the land and Gina and Anne Marie Porter solicited money towards the effort. Anne Marie conceived of placing donation boxes at the many retail stores and restaurants in Cruz Bay, thereby establishing the first fund-raising efforts to build a shelter.

Gina’s hopes and dreams were summarily thwarted when the local Government elected instead to grant the use of the land parcel to an island-born local

resident to establish a repair shop. After much follow-up negotiation, the Island Administrator instead offered the use of a vacant shack standing in the same general area. This shack had been where visiting St. Thomas veterinarians, Dr. Saunders and Dr. Williamson, had worked when they came over to St. John. Several years after the shack was formally allocated to the shelter, Dr. Williamson purchased a mobile van equipped for examinations, shots, and minor surgery. He'd drive his van weekly from St. Thomas onto the truck barge to cross Pillsbury Sound to St. John. Having the van eventually enabled him to also service animals out in Coral Bay—a community at the other end of the island—as well as in Cruz Bay.

The initial shack was a small, empty building: an actual wooden shack with a galvanized tin roof. A built-in wooden bench along one wall provided a place for clients to sit and wait while their companion animals were examined. Male cats and dogs could be castrated there, but Dr. Williamson took female animals for spaying back to St. Thomas where more sanitary conditions existed for the surgery. By this time, more tourists and longer-term visitors were coming to St. John for holiday. Some of them brought their pets with them or adopted a homeless island dog or cat. Having a reliable veterinarian visiting the island weekly enabled people to procure health certificates and rabies vaccinations for adopted animals. Thus, a trickle of St. John's homeless animals began to travel to life-long homes on the mainland.

## The Animal Care Center of St. John

A somewhat limited spay/neuter program was initiated by the volunteers who were now functioning under the name of the Animal Care Center of St. John. Financed primarily from monies collected in the donation boxes, the "Animal Care Center" could offer one free spay or neuter per day in an attempt to reduce the number of homeless animals. Some food was distributed to those residents who felt they could not afford food for their pets. Attempts were made to begin educating the island's young people into kindness for animals. The schools permitted a limited number of classroom visits with kittens and puppies. Bonny Corbeil and Anne Marie Porter worked privately on a "Kindness" program that featured an occasional small parade in Coral Bay as well as other forms of exposure to the concept of humane treatment of animals.

Constant setbacks and slow progress beset Gina's dream of building a proper shelter. It appeared that use of the shack with the medical assistance of the St. Thomas visiting veterinarians was as far as the new organization would be able to go. Costs of animal care escalated, the local Government remained resistant to further aid to the mission, and more and more incidents of abuse and neglect surfaced. Cherie Mulder left the island. Gina Burns, frustrated, disillusioned, and exhausted, decided to leave permanently. When she left in the late 1990's, she took with her a large kennel full of homeless puppies to her home in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts.

Engil Enui, a former resident, returned to St. John at that time and became a point person for island animal concerns. When a full-time veterinarian set up business in Palm Plaza outside Cruz Bay in late summer 1998, Engil worked as a technician there and served as a liaison between Canines, Cats, and Critters and the Animal Care Center. But after a few years, Engil, too, left the island permanently. However, her departure did not create a vacuum because Betty Gerhardt, the owner of Scandic Executive Services at Mongoose Junction, had already stepped in as a strong leader of the nascent ACC.

## Enter Betty Gerhardt

It was Betty Gerhardt who undertook to fulfill Gina Burns' dream. Betty worked night and day to have the "shack" turned into a genuine shelter. She often shortchanged her own business in order to solicit architect's plans and to solicit materials and workers—both volunteer and paid—to replace the shack with an air-conditioned structure that would occupy every inch of the footprint of the former structure. Architect's plans for the design were donated. They included a small waiting room, a room for cat cages, a workroom with a standing washbasin, a small bathroom, a small isolation room with its own entrance, and a small supply storage room. The later purchase of a washer and dryer would vastly improve working conditions. The footprint of the former shack was expanded as far as possible to accommodate all these functions. Further, the plans included fenced space outside the rear wall of the shelter for covered housing for dogs. This space was later expanded to the ultimate limits of the plot to include dog runs that extended beyond the covered housing. The additional 16 feet of property across the back of the building enabled the ACC to subsequently build additional dog runs and provide shade from the sun. A very small front porch was designed where traps to be used in the emerging trap/spay-neuter/release program could be stored. As ambitious as these blueprints were, Betty Gerhardt was determined that they would become reality. After two years of planning, soliciting funds

and free labor, construction and finalization (e.g., floor tiles were laid by volunteers Maia and Henry Mongie and walls were painted by anyone available), the new shelter was completed in 2002 and opened for the animals in 2003.

Gerhardt also organized the disparate animal advocates into an official organization with designated officers. This action would enable the ACC to apply for income tax deductible donations as well as to solicit grants. Gerhardt served as President, Diana Ripley as Vice President, and Robin Berlin as Treasurer. Anne Marie Porter volunteered as a member of this first formal ACC Board of Directors. Gerhardt advertised for a paid Shelter Manager, and Johanna Chauziuk's resume outshone all others. A Delta Airlines senior flight attendant on furlough, Johanna had organizational skills and a work ethic that brought professionalism to the shelter. Not only did she clean cages and runs, answer phone calls, take animals back and forth to the new veterinarian's office at Palm Plaza, and organize a volunteer force to walk dogs, she also wrote applications for grants, resulting in the ACC's first outside grant: from Pegasus Foundation of New England.

After expending several years of personal time and effort on building a modest but efficient shelter, Gerhardt experienced exhaustion and the need to redirect her time and energy to running her business. She said, "I've given these years to building the shelter, now I need to give the next years to Betty." But before stepping down, she recognized that the needs of the island's animals were so great that the shelter's limited funds and personnel might not be able to meet the increasing demands. As the shelter's existence became known about the island, more and more animals were arriving for sanctuary. Fearing closure, Gerhardt explored hitherto unconsidered means of insuring the shelter's survival. She contacted Dr. Elaine Campbell and asked her to write a white paper on the pros and cons of uniting the St. John Animal Care Center with the large and well-endowed St. Thomas Humane Society. The STHS Executive Director, Joe Elmore, and the STHS Board President, Joe Aubain, visited the new St. John shelter and met with its Board, inviting them to consider uniting with STHS under STHS direction. After interviewing numerous people, Campbell laid out the pros and cons for uniting with the well-established St. Thomas Society, concluding that the differences between the philosophy of the large island and of the small island were essentially incompatible, especially with respect to running an animal shelter. When the conclusions were submitted to the then-Board of Directors, the final decision to retain autonomy was largely influenced by the fact that the St. Thomas shelter was an established "kill" shelter (the number of homeless animals on the large island overwhelmed the shelter) whereas the St. John shelter wished to be "no-kill" as

far as was practical. According to Bonny Corbeil, “the concept of affiliation with St. Thomas was quickly and strongly rejected by community members due to the unique outlook of the St. John organization as well as fundamental differences in policy.”

## ACC Closure

Gerhardt’s fear of closure became a reality in October 2004 when adequate funds to continue were exhausted. Gerhardt resigned as ACC President, Johanna Chauziuk left the island, and the shelter closed its doors. The supporters of the shelter publicized the closure, hoping that the island’s residents would respond with support for reopening. In the meantime, Sheila Karcher, who had recently arrived in St. John from St. Croix, volunteered to serve in the closed shelter to respond to telephone calls and to care for the already-resident cats and dogs. No more animals could be accepted. This situation continued until January 2005 when Karen Brady, an employee of the Friends of the National Park, called an open meeting at the Mongoose Junction open-air restaurant. The meeting was extremely well-attended, attracting residents who had not hitherto worked on behalf of the Animal Care Center. Serving as substitute ACC Board President, Brady outlined committee structures she saw as necessary to be put into place if the shelter were to be reopened. From the audience, Elaine Campbell noted the absence of a Nominating Committee to assemble a professional Board of Directors, and Alvin White, an experienced fundraiser for national mainland charities, immediately seconded the motion to create a Nominating Committee. From the audience, Alyce Jordan, a nurse working at the island clinic, volunteered to chair the Nominating Committee and immediately called the first search meeting for the following week. Out of these rapidly conceived actions, the reorganization of the ACC began.

## 2005 Reorganization

Alyce Jordan obtained use of the clinic conference room where weekly and twice weekly meetings were held. Alyce called upon members of the quickly assembled Nominating Committee to sponsor the names of St. John residents to be sifted, discussed, and prioritized, giving the committee a timeframe of two to three months maximum for completion of their task. Nominating Committee members included Alyce Jordan, Alvin White, Jerry Karcher, Elaine Campbell, Lucy Portlock, Diana Ripley, Katha Ricciardi, Maia Mongie, and Monica Munro. They pulled together a list of over one hundred names for consideration as members of the Board of Directors for the still closed Animal Care Center. They contacted nominees to ascertain their willingness to serve

and asked for biographies. After only two and a half months of intense effort, a short list was narrowed down out of which further emerged 15 names. A ballot was designed and mailed to all known ACC contributors (over 300). Eileen Duffy, head of Catered To vacation rentals, paid for the mailings. Returns were sent to Alyce Jordan with a deadline of 15 March. The finalists, who now constituted the ACC Board of Directors, promptly met to elect officers. Sheila Karcher was elected President, Diana Ripley Vice President, John Fuller Secretary, and Holly Hardy Treasurer. Robin Berlin, who preferred not to serve on the Board, nevertheless volunteered to serve as accountant. On March 16, Betty Gerhardt presented the past files of the ACC to the newly-elected Board of Directors, and the March 21-27 issue of *Tradewinds*, the island newspaper, announced the results of the reorganization.

At the same time, Sheila Karcher and Valerie Peters, the Westin Resort Events Manager, quickly created a fabulous fundraiser to be held at the Westin on March 6. With extraordinary energy and with the backing of the resort, the two women created the "Paws and Claws Masquerade." Dress was island fancy and fantastic animal masks were issued at the door. The event, so quickly conceived and executed, attracted a very large turnout, raising somewhere between \$45,000 and \$50,000 and enabling the shelter to reopen its doors. The Board announced the reopening and hours of operation. A range of service was immediately put into place while an interim Shelter Manager, Andrea Allen, ran the day-by-day functions.

Katha Ricciardi, a Board member in charge of the "feral" cat program, called for volunteers to help her trap homeless cats to be spayed and neutered. Friendly cats would afterwards go to the shelter for adoption while less tame ones were returned to feeding stations being set up at various locations around the island. Katha also set up the "Adoption Clinic" to be held weekly at *The Marketplace*. Katha and her helpers brought adoptable cats, kittens, and puppies to the covered lobby of *The Marketplace* from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Wednesdays. In the meantime, Board member Diana Ripley, now serving as Shelter Committee Chairwoman, hired Connie Joseph as a paid, full-time Shelter Manager to replace Andrea Allen, the interim manager. Dog walkers were solicited and, again, a healthy response enabled the shelter to be run on a very conservative budget. Without pausing to catch their breath, the new Board swung into action to prepare for another fundraiser: the springtime Wagapalooza, scheduled for Sunday, May first. All this time, Board meetings were largely dedicated to creating By-Laws and a Charter, formulating meeting procedures, reapplying for tax-exempt status, setting up a committee structure, and discussing Standard Operating Procedures. Under John Fuller's leadership, the concept of an Executive Committee was introduced,

initially rejected but instituted in a subsequent year. In sum, 2005 was a watershed year for the St. John Animal Care Center.

## ACC Fundraising History

Wagapalooza had already been established as a fundraiser with proceeds to be donated to the Animal Care Center. The event had begun several years previously out in Coral Bay. Held at *Skinny Legs* bar and restaurant, it was initiated by Jen and Jeff Donnelly, along with Moe Chabuz and Doug Sica. The event has a fascinating history but was not connected to or administered by the ACC in its formative years. The Donnelly's had lived in Montserrat until the eruption of its volcano in 1995. They evacuated to St. Martin with their dog Apolla and a neighbor's dog named Marley. From St. Martin they subsequently moved on to St. John and found "the situation on St. John for animals. . . pretty bad." With the help of Joe and Laura Palminteri of Canines, Cats, and Critters—the recently arrived veterinary practice—they put together a zany dog show with prizes donated by local businesses. Joe Palminteri worked with Jen Donnelly to set up the two original shows held at *Skinny Legs*, and Dr. Laura served as judge for the various competition categories. In fact, it was these two Wagas plus proceeds from Christmas for the Animals at the South shore home of Stan and Alyse Rose that provided the seed money to keep the shelter open for the first two years of its existence. When the newly reorganized ACC looked at the history of the event, which had grown in size and popularity each year, they suggested it be moved to Cruz Bay, which offered a larger venue at the Winston Wells ball field. Hoping to attract the loyal Coral Bay residents as usual, the decision to move Wagapalooza's location enabled folks from St. Thomas to come over as well and also brought in many more Cruz Bay residents. Still managed in 2005 by non-ACC volunteers, headed by Pennie Howland, the relocated, growing event was a huge success with donated prizes awarded to dogs in six categories. The newly reorganized ACC Board was not yet in a position to set up such a large and complex event, but by helping the Coral Bay originators they learned for the future how to pull together the ACC's major fundraiser for subsequent years. By 2006, Wagapalooza was totally under the direction of the ACC and it earned approximately \$30,000. With the tried and true formula firmly in place, 2007 Waga raised \$27,000 and 2008 Waga raised \$25,000. The 2009 Wagapalooza, held under the capable chairmanship of Monica Munro, was again held in the Winston Wells ball field in Cruz Bay. In addition to the usual dog show categories, it featured fire dancers "Pyros of the Caribbean" and foods prepared by a new downtown restaurant, Crazy Crackers. The 2009 net proceeds for ACC were \$25,000.

## Christmas for the Animals



By wintertime 2005 the new ACC Board of Directors was ready to fully manage an annual fundraiser. As Waga was by tradition a springtime event, a holiday season event was appropriate. In contrast to the zany nature of Waga, the winter event was to be elegant. The precedent already existed. During the two years between completion of the shelter and the ACC reorganization in 2005, a “Christmas for the Animals” had been held at the home of donors Dr. Stan Rose and Dr. Alyse Rose. The Roses had recently purchased the private estate of Charley Beckwith—the largest private estate on St. John’s South Shore. “Estate Rose” was spacious both indoors and out with handsome walkways and gardens. The General Manager of Caneel Bay resort sent his chefs to Estate Rose to set up the buffet tables for the wonderful foods they brought with them. Although the event was not widely publicized, it helped provide shelter funding each of the two years. And it provided a model and set the tone for the new Board of Directors to follow.

With a committee structure now in place, fundraising chairwoman Suzanne Kirk offered her home in Peter Bay, “Villa La Susa,” for the 2005 Christmas for the Animals (CFA). Party guests were shuttled up the hill from Trunk Bay, seven of the island restaurants provided buffet foods while hors d’oeuvres and desserts were donated by island caterers. Premier Wines offered the accompanying wines. Dressed in “island fancy” many of St. John’s citizens filled Villa La Susa, with the result that the event raised \$21,700, after expenses, in support of the shelter. The following year, a similar pattern of organization was followed and a different gorgeous villa was secured as site for what was now an annual fundraiser. The 2006 CFA committee chairwoman, BJ Harris, announced that Bill Neill had offered his home, “Poseidon’s Secret,” for that year’s winter fundraiser. Poinsettias were used to decorate the Mediterranean-style, waterfront villa and were given away as door prizes. Board members donated Christmas ornaments to decorate a lighted palm tree that was auctioned off at the end of the party. The 2006 CFA raised \$11,000. The pattern now in place enabled the increasingly experienced ACC Board team to prepare for the event, not yet realizing that one of their principal roles was becoming that of a fundraising team to keep the shelter afloat. The third year, 2007, saw “Kismet”—a large, elaborate, newly built villa atop a high South shore hill—the scene of Christmas for the Animals. Bonny Corbeil chaired the event with characteristic energy and enthusiasm. The villa owners, Dr. Jerome and Mrs. Liz Levy, opted for a theme party celebrating the architectural concept of Kismet. Dressed in Arabian Nights finery, the Levys and their guests watched a fire dancer and listened to Koko and the Sunshine Band while again the best chefs on the island donated culinary offerings with complimentary cocktails and wine pairings. The event netted \$22,000 for the shelter. In 2008, the pattern for a costume theme was revisited at beautiful “Tango Mare” villa on Hart Bay. Owners Ed and Sharon Metz and Lynn and Terry English donated the use of their villa which ACC Board members

decorated all in silver, black, and red. This time the event featured a roaring twenties theme with guests encouraged to dress in island fancy or 1920's garb. Tickets remained at \$100 per person and could be purchased at the Chelsea Drugstore, St. John Hardware, Connections, and the ACC shelter. Raffles that featured gifts, services, and meals from over thirty St. John businesses were held and the event raised \$14,000.

### No Fleas, Please Flea Market

The newest of the ACC fundraisers was introduced in October 2007. Simpler in execution than the other two annual events, the flea market has reached out to a much wider segment of St. John residents. First suggested during the July 2007 monthly Board meeting, the flea market was entitled "No Fleas, Please." President Harris called for a "committee of the whole" to plan the event. Storage-on-Site donated a container to be placed by the shelter to hold all manner of donations from the island's residents. Publicity flyers were widely distributed. The Westin Resort and Villas donated much handsome furniture from its most recent redecorating project, Oriel Smith donated his good-condition, slightly older car for what became a fabulous raffle prize, and John Campbell solicited gently used toys from all his grandchildren to be offered reasonably at his "Children's Table." So much merchandise was donated to ACC that the event, which had been planned for one day, was continued a second day. The flea market, held under borrowed tents, was centrally located in the Winston Wells ball field in downtown Cruz Bay, attracting many children and adults. Several grandmothers explained that they were doing their Christmas shopping for their grandchildren at the Children's Table. The first-time effort netted \$13,441 for the ACC, and the Board decided to hold the flea market in October each year. In 2008, "No Fleas, Please" was again held for two days to the delight of island residents. Several customers asked if the flea market would be held every month in the future! Again Westin donated several vans full of handsome furniture including headboards, granite-topped tables, and 300 framed prints. The Children's Table was again staffed by John Campbell, cold drinks were for sale, and beautiful new clothing was donated by Susan Stair who was closing her Bougainvillea shop at the Westin. The Saturday event continued on Sunday after which leftover merchandise was donated to a mission taking clothing and furnishings to Haiti. A lot of hard labor hauling furniture and merchandise went into the event and a large number of volunteers assisted the core group. Approximately \$11,000 was raised.

Occasional other small fundraisers are held each year to benefit the ACC. The annual "Bar Wars" is held at the Beach Bar in Cruz Bay, and for several years

“Halloween for the Animals” has been held at Morgan’s Mango restaurant, also in Cruz Bay. Although these events do not raise especially large amounts of money, they demonstrate that some business owners on the island support the ACC’s efforts.

## Fundraising Conclusion

From the foregoing review of St. John Animal Care Center’s fundraisers, it is apparent that Board members and volunteers put a tremendous effort into the three events upon which the shelter depends for income. Collection boxes yield a steady stream of money, but it is clear that the fundraisers—as popular as they are—are barely sufficient to keep the shelter running. Nor do they provide a financial return commensurate with the time and strenuous work that goes into creating them.

Our organization appears to be weak on two income-producing fronts: membership and grants. Various Board members have undertaken compiling membership lists and mailing simple solicitations annually. But the returns remain disappointing. The native population of the island is not generally interested in or supportive of animal-advocacy efforts. Visitors and tourists are generous about dropping coins and bills into the collection boxes, but that is a somewhat haphazard means of raising money. There are numerous wealthy homeowners on the island—often part-time residents—but they are more inclined to donate money to the support of the National Park or to the island schools.

We need to learn how to raise funds from beyond the island residents—full- or part-time. We need to learn where grants are available for small, needy animal shelters, and how to apply for them. We need to learn the ins-and-outs of grant application writing: what techniques have a history of success, which approaches to avoid. This will not be easy to do from a very small Caribbean island where residents lack grant-writing experience. Further, even grant awards may be shaky in the current (2009) economic climate, but the future survival of the shelter and the animals that seek refuge there depends upon our learning more sophisticated fundraising techniques.

## Shelter Operations

The centerpiece of all these activities—fundraising, meetings, publicity, adoption clinics, feeding stations—is the shelter in Cruz Bay and the animals who reside there, waiting for adoption. Over the years, the shelter has been home and sanctuary to hundreds of cats and dogs. Two women have been the shelter’s mainstay since reorganization: Connie Joseph, the Shelter Manager, and Diana Ripley, the unpaid Operations Manager. Without either, the shelter would not function as smoothly as it does.

Diana Ripley has been a member of the ACC Board of Directors from even before her participation in the reorganization Nominating Committee. Her interest has always been on shelter operations. Her practical knowledge of construction and maintenance details enabled her to supervise the building of the dog runs, installation of exterior lighting, and the recent hookup to town water supply, as examples. She pitches in to walk the dogs when there are no part-time workers available. She brings doggie treats from St. Thomas and keeps in constant touch with Connie Joseph regarding the kennel and cage residents.

Connie Joseph is the “face” of the ACC. When she has completed her chores of cleaning cat cages, mopping floors, and doing laundry, she serves as the ACC receptionist. She receives newly arriving cats, kittens, dogs, and puppies and interviews people stopping by to inquire about adopting a pet. She drives the animals to the on-island veterinarian for medical attention, picks them up after surgery, and nurses them through their multiple health problems. She’s especially adept at nursing tiny motherless kittens with small bottles of substitute mother’s milk.

In addition, Connie Joseph now officiates at the weekly “Adoption Clinic” held at *The Marketplace*. A labor-intensive effort, this is often the only glimpse residents and visitors have of our organization. Connie selects a few adoptable puppies, dogs, cats, and kittens and brings them to the foyer of Cruz Bay’s major center for food shopping. For approximately four hours once a week, she answers inquiries and displays some of our resident animals. Children and adults stop by to admire the animals. Once in a while, a good adoption match results. When that happens, all the effort of loading and unloading the animals and setting up the ACC station is rewarded. Even if no good adoption match takes place, the exposure of some of our animals to the public is value enough.

There is a relatively small, but not insignificant, program aimed at promoting “Off-Island Adoptions.” This program was initiated three years ago based on a model that one of the ACC Board members observed while visiting Grand Turk in the Turks and Caicos Islands (T&C). There, the proximity to Florida by plane and the burgeoning number of homeless puppies combined so that Grand Turk can now claim literally hundreds of puppies being adopted each year by visitors to the island. The volunteer humane group there is assisted financially by the T&C government, whereas the St. John Animal Care Center has barely any support from the local USVI government—neither financial nor legal. Nor has there been until recently any sense of cooperation or encouragement from the local police force in helping with cases of cruelty to animals. However, St. John ACC has had full-color flyers designed and posted in all the many rental villas as well as at the Westin Resort and Villas and at commercial locations around the island, briefly describing the ease of taking a homeless cat, kitten, or puppy back to the mainland as an in-cabin plane passenger. The acceptance of animals varies according to the airline, all of which fly from the St. Thomas airport. Currently, American Airlines appears to be the one airline with the most “animal-friendly” policies. It’s impossible to keep statistics on how many of our homeless animals are going to stateside homes because visitors adopt them not only from the shelter but also from the grounds of the two major resorts and sometimes from the rental villas. ACC staff and volunteers stand ready to assist visitors with advice, carrying cases, and rides to the vet’s office for required shots and documentation.

### The Shelter Today

In 2009, we provided sanctuary in our shelter to 91 kittens and 13 cats. We also sheltered 29 dogs and 36 puppies. It is of note that, increasingly, puppies are being born in the shelter as contrasted to being brought in as found in the bush. Thirty-six puppies and 12 dogs were adopted from the shelter in 2009; 36 kittens and eight cats were adopted from the shelter during the calendar year. There is no explanation for the fall in adoptions from 160 in 2008 to 92 in 2009. While statistics are not possible to collect, it is clear that island-wide, an increasing number of dogs, cats, puppies, and kittens are being adopted by visitors from the mainland. Our records indicate that during 2009, 308 cats and kittens were spayed or neutered and 28 dogs spayed or neutered. The shelter manager, Connie Joseph, points out that all the animals taken to the vet from the shelter were tested for disease and appropriate shots given to all incoming shelter residents. Unfortunately, 23 cats tested positive for feline leukemia were euthanized. Four dogs were euthanized for advanced heartworm or severe behavioral problems. Several rescued animals were deemed beyond recovery and euthanized. As a “no-kill” shelter, we must consider such decisions very carefully.

In 2008, we provided ten tons of cat food to feed our feral or homeless cats at 35 feeding stations around the island, an average of 20 cats at each station. In 2009, we maintained 30 feeding stations although the number of stations changes with circumstances. These feeding stations are maintained by volunteers who live in the areas near the feeding stations, and the volunteers are strongly urged to try to trap as many of the cats as possible in order to have them spayed or neutered. When the cats arrive at Canine, Cats, and Critters during a once-a-week spay/neuter clinic, they are tested for feline leukemia and then vaccinated. Fortunately, there are only two small pockets on the island where feline leukemia has been found, and there are no rabies yet in evidence on the island. Despite the absence of rabies, cats and dogs flying to the mainland must be vaccinated in conformity with U.S. Agriculture laws. All dogs entering the shelter are now tested and treated for heartworms in addition to being spayed or neutered. These tests and medical procedures, in addition to shelter labor, constitute the ACC's greatest expense. With only one full-time veterinary practice on the island, ACC is the captive, as it were, of non-competitive medical pricing.

President Ripley reports that the 2009 ACC operating budget was \$160,000. It was \$175,000 in 2008 and we were able to reduce that somewhat the following year by finding a secondary source of dry cat food for supplying our feeding stations. In 2007 our operating budget was \$150,000. The increase reflects not only increasing costs but, more importantly, our commitment to more testing and vaccinations for our shelter residents. Also, the increased number of dog runs has resulted in an increase of residents to be fed and medicated. One significant improvement in 2009 that cut some expense was the hookup to town water, a long-awaited development that dispenses with our having to buy truckloads of desalinated water from local vendors. We are happy to report that membership dues-paying donors increased in 2009, providing \$15,500 in funding. At the moment, however, ACC is not the recipient of any grant monies.

In sum, our shelter remains small and our struggle to collect money to cover the needs of our homeless companion animals is endless. We have a very small margin for financial error. Only at the end of calendar year 2008 were we able to initiate a "building fund" with a donation of \$5,000 matched with another \$5,000. If need arises, this fund will be tapped for operating expenses. One day we may be able to find a small piece of land in the country to allow for future expansion and perhaps even enable us to help the island's wild donkeys that are sometimes abused or hit by speeding cars. But that goal is a far-future one. For the present, we must concentrate on keeping open the doors of our little shelter in Cruz Bay, and on caring for as many of the island's cats and dogs as we are able.

May 2009; updated February 2010©  
E. Campbell

