

## Senior Pets for Senior People

Senior Pets for Senior People is an exciting new community outreach program geared for seniors in the greater Portland area. The Animal Refuge League of Greater Portland (ARL), located in Westbrook, ME launched the program to help place senior pets in permanent homes with senior people in the community. The outcome will give senior pets a second chance at life as well as provide companions for local seniors. Staff at the ARL will (upon request from senior centers, senior recreation programs, assisted living facilities, nursing homes), conduct a short seminar discussing the benefits of the program, as well as pet care.

The benefits of pet ownership are many, especially for seniors. According to the Humane Society of The United States pets ease loneliness, enhance general health and well-being, lower blood pressure, decrease stress, reduce bone loss, lower cholesterol levels, improve blood circulation, among other benefits ([www.hsus.org](http://www.hsus.org)).

The goal at the ARL is to encourage seniors to come to the shelter to adopt a senior companion. Our hope is that many homeless senior pets so deserving of a second chance at life will find their way to a home where they can live out the rest of their life being cared for and loved. The beauty of matching senior pets with senior people is they tend to be easier to care for than a puppy or even a younger cat or kitten that most likely has a lot of energy to burn. Most of the senior animals would be so content just to have a cozy lap or a bed to snuggle up in and a human companion to love them.

Although the ARL normally charges a modest adoption fee to help recover costs, they will be waiving the adoption fees with this program. The ARL understands that in difficult economic times money is a consideration when thinking about adding a pet to your home; “we would much rather have the adopter save what would be the adoption fee and put it towards vet care – it’s our way of helping out” said Sarah Ashe, Feline Manager for the ARL.

Although the ARL will waive adoption fees for pets in the Seniors-to-Seniors Program, these pets will receive the same medical attention as all pets coming through the ARL. This includes: spaying/neutering, all vaccinations, screening tests, de-worming, flea treatment, a veterinarian check and a free veterinarian exam with a vet of the adopter’s choice (from a list of over 30 participating veterinarians) after the adoption. Microchipping is optional for a nominal fee.

The ARL offers other programs that may prove helpful for seniors with pets as well. There is the Furry Friends Pet Food Pantry where people can come to get food for their pets if they cannot afford to buy food. The shelter will provide resource listings for help with the cost of spaying and neutering animals and for low cost vaccine clinics as well as listings for help with veterinary care. They also work with a groomer willing to make house calls at a reduced cost for seniors. The shelter can even arrange for delivery of food if a senior that goes through this program to adopt does not have transportation.

To qualify for this program, you must be a senior 55 years and older. All you need do is attend one of the seminars. At the seminar, you will be given a pass to visit the ARL during business hours to adopt a pet (the pass does not expire). You may even adopt the pet (on the spot) that comes to the seminar. The ARL has already begun outreach meetings. If you are interested in having an ARL representative speak at your facility or community center, please contact Toni McLellan, Director of Operations at (207)854-9771.