

Potomac ALMANAC

The staff at the Montgomery County Humane Society fell in love with this cat, Tippy. He was adopted by a family even though he is older than the age that adopters typically look for.

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Dogs Miss Itsy, Miss Bitsy and Miss Mitsy were victims in an animal cruelty case and recovered at PetConnect's Muddy Paws Farm.

'We All Fell in Love'

MCHS and PetConnect help place animals in the Potomac area in homes.

BY KARA COLEMAN
THE ALMANAC

Tippy was a black and white cat who the Montgomery County Humane Society estimated to be either 8 or 9 years old when he arrived there. Since he was far removed from being a kitten, Tippy didn't fit the profile of a traditionally adoptable animal.

But his personality charmed the MCHS employees.

"He was such a great cat that he was allowed to wander," said Howard White, director of external affairs for MCHS. "He sort of became the mascot of the place and had the run of everything. We all fell in love with Tippy."

White said that the Humane Society's CEO wanted to adopt Tippy, and had convinced her husband to come meet the cat. By the time the couple arrived at the shelter so that she could introduce her husband to Tippy, he had already been adopted.

"People don't always stop to think, 'Maybe my lifestyle will be better with an older, more sedate cat than a kitten,'" White said. "In some ways, Tippy was the least likely to be adopted and in some ways he was the best one to adopt."

The MCHS had previously been responsible for the county's animal shelter, but that partnership ended in March. Now, the MCHS is primarily concentrating on placing dogs and cats with families, although White said that the group does occasionally take in other small furries, such as rabbits.

According to the Humane Society of the United States 2013 Annual Report, 118,328 animals were cared for last year by the Humane Society and its affiliates, through disaster relief, cruelty interventions, wildlife rehab centers and more. But that number doesn't count the local rescue groups around the country who work to protect, shelter, and rehabilitate animals and adopt them out to homes, including many in the southern Maryland area.

PetConnect, a group based in Potomac, is a mixed-breed rescue group who, like MCHS, focuses on dogs and cats. PetConnect's mission, according to Director of Operations Catherine Edwards, is to pull animals from shelters where they are in danger of being euthanized.

"We started as a grassroots effort in 2005," said Edwards. "We helped with Hurricane Katrina efforts, and we pull from local shelters as well as other states."

MCHS has a no-kill philosophy, according to White. He says that the Humane Society works with other shelters and groups in the area, taking dogs and cats that the other shelters don't have space for and placing them into adoptive families or foster homes. MCHS currently has between 18 and 20 staff members and is looking for volunteers to foster animals.

"Spring means kittens and puppies," White said. "People don't have their cats fixed, and suddenly as a result, you have

SEE FINDING HOMES. PAGE 5

Dissecting Comedy

Potomac author releases third book, "Poking a Dead Frog."

BY SUSAN BELFORD
THE ALMANAC

If you picked up a book titled "Poking a Dead Frog," might it be about biology, herpetology or even paleontology? Mike Sacks' latest book is about none of these. Instead it is a collection of his "Conversations with Today's Top Comedy Writers."

His title came from a quote by E.B. White who wrote in *The New Yorker*: "Humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind ... [Humor] won't stand much poking. It has a certain fragility, an evasiveness which one had best respect."

Sacks writes "... the crux is that the process can be fascinating to a certain type of person. Not the type who wants comedy dissected to the point of death, necessarily, but the type interested in understanding the art and business behind comedy; of what it takes, exactly to make a career out of attempting to induce laughter from complete strangers with only the words or images that you create ... And, as you will read here, it is a tough, yet fascinating life."

In "Poking a Dead Frog," Sacks compiles a wealth of revealing interviews with renown comedy writers including Amy Poehler, Mel Brooks, George Saunders, Bill Hader, Dan Guterma, Adam Resnick and James Downey. His book looks into the ups and downs of comedic writing – as well as behind-the-scenes in TV shows like *Saturday Night Live*.

"This book was a great excuse to converse with the best comedy writers of our time. After talking with some of the writers for more than 20 hours, I became friends with them. It was an amazing opportunity to interview someone like Mel Brooks – after all, I watched his movies at the theaters at White Flint," Sacks said.

Sacks is the son of Elaine and Jerry Sacks who reside in Potomac. He graduated from Churchill High School and Tulane University and now lives in New York City where he is a writer for *Vanity Fair* magazine and also a published humor author of "Your Wildest Dreams, Within Reason" and "And Here's the Kicker: Conversations with 21



Mike Sacks

Humor Writers About Their Craft."

He has had articles published in *GQ*, *The New Yorker*, *Time*, *Esquire*, *McSweeney's*, *Vanity Fair* and other magazines.

Sacks is married with a 5-year-old daughter who "can't believe all the green space when she comes to Potomac to visit her grandparents and to see where daddy grew up. We took her to Cabin John Park – nothing like it in Manhattan."

His father, Jerry Sacks, said, "Michael's mother and I are not

surprised that Mike has written for so many fine magazines. At *Churchill*, he wrote and edited for *Erehwon*, the literary magazine that won numerous national awards. Strange to think that he's gone from *Erehwon* to now working at *Vanity Fair* magazine in New York, and to teaching at many universities, including NYU, Yale, and Humber College in Toronto.

"He's become a mentor and adviser to many young writers who want to get into the field of comedy writing. From the latest book, we particularly enjoyed the interviews with screenwriter and novelist Bruce Jay Friedman, as well as the interview with 97-year-old Peg Lynch. Peg invented the modern sitcom form. Beyond that, she's incredibly sharp and still incredibly funny."

Growing up, Sacks did not aspire to become a comedian, although he did see a lot of comedy in D.C. as a youth. However, he was a fan of *Letterman*, *SNL*, *Monty Python* and sit-coms and has always been interested in the process and the writing.

His wry sense of humor is displayed at the end of his book by his author's photo. Instead of the typical glossy glamour-shot, the photo is of actor and friend Jon Hamm ("Mad Men") sitting at a typewriter in his

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Author Mike Sacks with his dogs.

PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

'Poking a Dead Frog'

FROM PAGE 3

t-shirt.

He sums up his choice to become a writer: "Choosing a career as a writer is like joining the circus. You're off the path and into the woods. If you must know

exactly where you'll be at all times and where exactly you'll be in the future, get a job in an office complex in Gaithersburg, Md., which I did for a few years. It's not fun. So just enjoy yourself and keep your head down and keep moving forward and when you trip, get up. Keep doing it. Repeat. That's life."

Finding Homes for Animals

FROM PAGE 3

a litter of kittens and you don't know what to do with them. We would really love people who are willing to take them while we look for forever homes."

PetConnect has a foster program as well, but four years ago, the group was given a five-acre farm by an anonymous benefactor. The farm, Muddy Paws Farm in Mount Airy, is home to many of the dogs that PetConnect takes in.

"We have seven to 12 dogs up there, on constant rotation," Edwards said. She said that the Muddy Paws caretaker, Tammy Mathis, has experience as a vet tech, and several area high school students with an interest in a veterinary career volunteer at the farm each summer.

PetConnect is 100 percent donation driven, according to Edwards. The group doesn't receive any funding from the government, and Edwards said that veterinary bills are its biggest expense. She said that PetConnect rescued a shih tzu named Buzz from a high kill animal shelter. When Buzz started coughing, Mathis took him to the vet, where he was diagnosed with an upper respiratory cough and was given an antibiotic. Over the period of a couple of days, Buzz's cough developed into pneumonia, which required critical care. Buzz's vet bills added up to about \$3,500. Edwards said that Buzz is now on the road to recovery and to being adopted by a family.

Edwards said that PetConnect pulled about 750 animals to safety last year, including adopting out 448 dogs and 221 cats.

According to White, MCHS tries to set up rabies clinics in economically disadvantaged areas of Mont-



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Tippy was adopted out to a family even though he is older than the age that adopters typically look for.

gomery County at least once a month, and they try to host microchip clinics once a month as well.

"Everybody should have vaccines. Everybody should have microchips," White said. "Microchips are like magic. If your dog or cat goes missing, the shelter can contact you."

Both MCHS and PetConnect claim that they are in need of volunteers to foster animals.

"The more fosters we have, the more animals can be saved," Edwards said. "If we work together, we can do more than anyone working individually."

For more information or to volunteer with the Montgomery County Humane Society, visit mchumane.org or call 240-252-2555.

For more information or to volunteer with PetConnect, visit petconnectrescue.org or call 1-877-838-9171.

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