

WAYSTATION PROGRAM AIMS TO SOLVE PET OVERPOPULATION

*By Sam Miller,
Media Relations Manager*

For more than a century, the Avondale Mills factory system headquartered in Sylacauga, Alabama, served as the economic lifeblood of the community, employing thousands.

After a nearly 110-year history of textile production, the mills shut down in 2006, leaving more than 4,000 people unemployed. Many residents had to relocate, leaving their homes, and for some their unaltered dogs, behind.

In the years that followed, the dogs roamed the old factory complex in Sylacauga and produced numerous litters -- more than doubling the 100 dogs estimated to have been left behind.

When Carolyn Morse learned about the abandoned dogs, who had also suffered a terrible loss when Avondale Mills closed, she and a small army of volunteers got to work. They were up against the clock to save them, with dogs living inside of the mill that was set to be demolished.

They began catching the dogs by offering food or through humane trapping methods, and worked with Big Fluffy Dog Rescue in Nashville, Tennessee, to provide spay/neuter surgeries and other triage care, as well as placement with rescue organizations or in homes. Over the next two years, the small but mighty group rescued more than 225 dogs from the old mill village.

Following the success in saving these animals, Morse, along with her husband and three dedicated volunteers, incorporated The Feral Dogs of Avondale Mill and Friends of Sylacauga Animal Shelter, a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the newly-opened municipal shelter and homeless animals in the area. Despite the additional services and support they provided, the community continued to struggle with pet overpopulation.

In 2017, the group sought help by signing on as a shelter partner of St. Hubert's Animal Welfare Center's WayStation program – a critical lifeline given the city shelter's increasing intake numbers. Since then, St. Hubert's has transported

nearly 850 dogs from Sylacauga to destination partners in the Northeast for adoption.

"Pictures of their adoptions mean everything," said Morse. "There's a sigh of relief; a smile that they made it; a reminder to keep going for the next one waiting!"

St. Hubert's WayStation program has emerged as the best-in-class transport program in the nation. With its movement of animals throughout the country, the WayStation has created unprecedented collaboration among sheltering organizations to address population disparity and root challenges in communities.

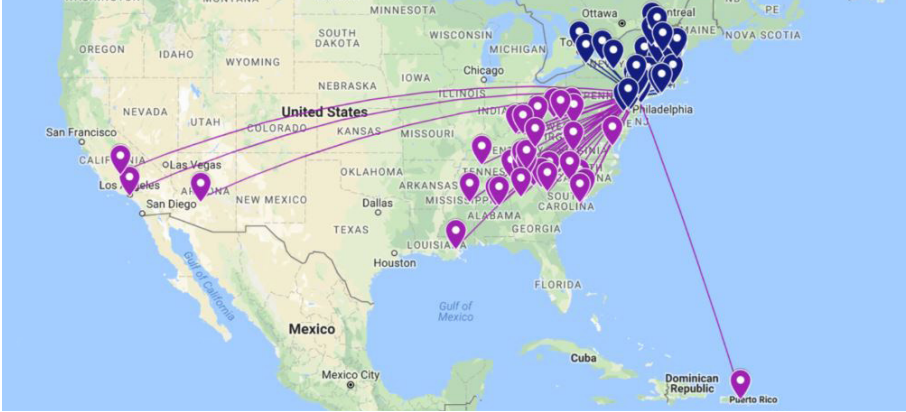
Since its inception in August 2016, the program has built a network of more than 80 organizations that work together to save animals' lives and invest in source communities. In just three years, the program has relocated nearly 11,000 dogs from areas of the country where the number of homeless dogs far exceeds the available homes.

What's more, destination partners return a portion of the adoption fee for every relocated dog back to the source shelter. These funds are earmarked for low or no cost spay/neuter surgeries to reduce the number of homeless puppies entering their shelters. WayStation partners have invested more than \$272,000 in tackling the root cause of the problem, and the amount increases with each transport.

In Sylacauga, the give back funds were used to expand a program that attracts lines of people waiting to purchase low-cost spay/neuter vouchers. In 2017, the organization sold just over 500 vouchers. Following a \$5,000 grant from St. Hubert's in 2018, 734 people purchased the low-cost vouchers that year. So far in 2019, community members purchased nearly 600 low-cost spay/neuter vouchers.

"The \$5,000 donation was a turning point," Morse said. "It fueled the community. It brought awareness of how daunting our situation is in Sylacauga, and sparked more interest in spay and neutering and volunteering."





SUPPORTED BY: PETSMART Charities

SISTER SHELTER WAYSTATION

by the numbers

The Humane Rescue Alliance (HRA) is proud to be a destination shelter via the WayStation and our legacy transport program, and to open available dens in our adoption centers to dogs who may otherwise not find homes in their originating communities, while maintaining a high level of care and commitment to our local animals. So far in 2019, HRA has welcomed more than 1,000 animals from source shelters, an almost 400 percent increase from this time last year.

"Transporting healthy, adoptable pets from our community to our more northern partner shelters like Humane Rescue Alliance has made the single biggest impact on our lifesaving ability," said Amanda Paris, Director of Southern Pines Animal Shelter in Mississippi. "A decade ago, we were euthanizing 80 percent of the pets in our care each year which was just devastating to our staff and our community. Thanks to transport, that number is now less than 5 percent."

Along with physically welcoming animals, HRA works with our partners to ensure we are not a bandaid for the problem of pet overpopulation by supporting them in addressing the root cause in their areas.

"With fewer pets in our shelter, we are able to focus on other lifesaving programs like spay/neuter, wellness, etc. and keep the pets that are staying in our communities healthier and happier," added Paris.

HRA/St. Hubert's believes we must build an alliance across the sheltering field to weave a safety net in every corner of the country only made possible with a continued united effort to share resources and connect overwhelmed shelters with those that have ample capacity, potential adopters, and resources. As a merged organization, HRA/St. Hubert's will continue to invest in the WayStation program to do just that.

Hansel, an abandoned dog Morse and her team rescued from the Avondale Mill, pictured at the time he was rescued and at his adoption from St. Hubert's.



44 source rescue partners

38 destination rescue partners

Nearly **11,000** animals relocated for adoptions since inception 8/1/16

341 animals transported each month (on average)

More than **\$272,000** provided to source communities to support spay/neuter