

## Focus On The Ferret Nook

**From fostering ferrets to forming a ferret rescue and assisting more than 1,700 ferrets, Kathy Fritz of The Ferret Nook in Wisconsin has helped ferrets for 20 years.**

*By Troy Lynn Eckart*

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© Courtesy of Kathy Fritz

Angel, Bucky and Wizzle are a bonded threesome seeking a new home. They're about 2 years old. Their previous owner became allergic to ferrets.

The Ferret Nook has had 1,753 ferrets come through its doors — 220 in Illinois and the balance in Wisconsin. Shelter operator Kathy Fritz started as a ferret foster parent in Illinois in the late 80s and became a state-licensed shelter in 1991 as the Central Illinois Friends of Ferrets.

In the fall of 1996 Kathy's husband, Barry, took a position as a vice president at a Wisconsin company, necessitating a move. No one near them in Illinois wanted to take on the responsibility of the shelter, so the Fritz's moved the shelter's 66 ferrets with them. In Wisconsin, Kathy founded The Ferret Nook Inc. A few years ago the name changed to Ferret Nook Shelter/Adoption Center, to better reflect the services provided. The Ferret Nook serves the south-central Wisconsin area and works with three other ferret shelters and several county humane societies.

### The Ferret Population

A few years ago, The Ferret Nook's population reached an all-time high at more than 200 ferrets. At times, the ferret population has been as low as 60. Typically the shelter houses 30 to 40 adoptable ferrets, along with up to 50 long-term residents.

"We don't like to refer to them as permanent, because I feel all ferrets deserve a permanent home," Kathy said. "We just don't seem to get as many special owners willing to take on the long-term medical expenses of the older ferret as we have older ferrets here at the shelter. I guess that would be tops on my 'want list' — responsible ferret families for our older ferrets!"

### Finding Funds & Help

From a fundraising perspective, Kathy Fritz said she was fortunate to have a member put her in contact with the National W-Club, which is an organization that provides concessions at sporting events. "We provide the help," Kathy said, "and we make a percentage of what is sold at our concession stand."

After three years of staffing a concession stand at the University of Wisconsin's home football games and men's varsity hockey games, this funding source now brings in 40 percent of the shelter's annual budget, Kathy said. "This has been a salvation for our shelter and has helped keep our doors open!"

Other funding sources include working with PetSmart and PetSmart Charities; holding bratwurst sales at the local Wal-Mart; and receiving a portion of the gross sales from the Fritz's website, Kritter Koncepts.

In addition to these funds, Kathy's husband, Barry, helps the shelter. "Barry builds cages, which also has been a tremendous help to the shelter residents! He gives us a very nice discount on his cages."

Volunteers are also crucial to the continued success of The Ferret Nook. "We wouldn't be able to keep going without the help of a small core of volunteers," Kathy said. "We thank them from the bottom of our hearts for the many hours of dedicated service they give to our shelter ferrets."

© Courtesy of Kathy Fritz

Two-and-a-half year old Sadie and Fisher are mates that are seeking to be adopted together. Their previous owner moved and couldn't take them along.

### Ferret Stories

No single ferret sticks out in Kathy's mind as the most rewarding rescue. To Kathy, each ferret is very special.

Kathy and Barry helped with the latest large-scale rescue in Ohio. Kathy and Barry spent three days at the rescue, helping

in any way they could, and saw the amazing transformation a few ferret lovers made in the first days of the rescue. The efforts progressed from just being able to feed, water and spritz-down the ferrets to keep them alive to seeing the ferrets in cages with clean bedding, water bottles and food bowls. "That's when sheltering becomes rewarding," Kathy said. "When you know you have made a difference and not having to be told, but to see it in each and every ferret's eyes. You know you have changed their life for the better."

Kathy believes that every ferret that passes through their doors is a sad case. "They each have their own story to tell — I could fill a book with stories," Kathy said. For her, the saddest cases are ferrets that are given up after being with an owner for three to five years. For whatever reason, they become a burden to the owner. "We shelter owners hear it all the time," Kathy said. Owners say they can't give the ferret the attention it needs and want the shelter to find it a new home.

"At this stage in their little lives is when their family should be loving them the most!" Kathy said. "Yes, they become a burden, but it comes along with pet ownership and commitment! The best advice I can give a ferret owner is please, please give your old-timers the best retirement they can have — your love and attention! Please don't give them up to the overburdened ferret shelters."

#### Life At The Ferret Nook

Each day at The Ferret Nook starts out early and ends very late. "I don't have a typical 9 to 5 job," Kathy said. "I don't have to worry about taking my job home with me because my home is the shelter! Don't call me before I've had my first cup of coffee — it's not pretty!"

After Kathy has her caffeine, she starts with the daily mush feeding and medicating. Then play times start — with five play areas for the ferrets (three for the long term residents and two for the adoptables). Groups are rotated out daily.

While the ferrets play, bedding changes are done, litter boxes are cleaned, and food and water bowls are refilled. In the morning e-mails are checked and answered, background checks are done on pre-adoption applications, and phone calls are returned. Each Monday morning, a report is printed out of any medical needs for the week, which include distemper and rabies vaccinations; melatonin implants; microchips; glucose checks; and scheduling veterinary visits. Kathy tries to schedule adoption interviews on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays when her volunteers are available so she has time to devote to interviews; however, she is flexible in setting up appointments.

Kathy sums it up this way. "Ferret sheltering is a labor of love — and the pay is lousy — but at the end of a very long day all I have to do is look over at any one of many cages and see the little round lumps under their sleep sacks to know this is where I belong."

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