

Helping Ferrets In Washington D.C.

Meet the people and learn the mission of the Washington (DC) Metro Area Ferret Outreach (WMAFO).

By Troy Lynn Eckart

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Noodle is an energetic, young, male ferret being fostered by WMAFO while he awaits a forever home. He is bonded with Lotte.

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Lotte is a gentle, young, female ferret that loves to give kisses. She's at WMAFO awaiting her new forever home. She is bonded with Noodle.

In the fall of 2010 when one of the DC area shelters closed, the Washington (DC) Metro Area Ferret Outreach (WMAFO) was founded. Its board members are Bonnie Russell, Stephanie Richmond, Lisa Oestereich and Tommy Tavenner, all of whom volunteered for other organizations before and were long-time ferret owners. Since opening, 29 ferrets have gone through the WMAFO program, with an average of 15 to 20 ferrets in the foster program waiting for loving, responsible homes. The WMAFO slogan sums up its mission: "WMAFO: Minding our Business Since 2010."

Ferret Success And Ferret Sadness

"Every time we save a surrendered ferret's life by getting it vet care, it's a success," Russell said. "Each time we adopt a ferret out to a good home, that's a success too."

Russell said that the most rewarding case to date involved rescuing a ferret in western Maryland that lived in deplorable conditions and never got let out of its cage. "He's now about the happiest ferret around and is being fostered by an amazing family," Russell said. "They occasionally send us videos of him, which makes us happy."

Although the organization is only about a year old, its members have had sad rescue experiences already. One involved two ferrets that were turned over because their owner was in hospice care with a terminal illness and the owner's daughter was out of work and struggling. Russell said, "Those two women loved their ferrets so much, and the ferrets loved them."

Words Of Wisdom About Ferrets

"Make a savings account now for vet bills when your ferret gets older," Russell said. She also advises ferret owners to learn as much as possible about ferrets. You can never learn too much. In some areas, legal issues arise. "Ferrets are illegal to own in Washington, D.C., without a waiver from the DC Department of Health, and many of the counties in the area require rabies vaccines for ferrets. Ferret-friendly rentals are hard to find in the area as well, so we do require written proof that you are allowed to have ferrets if you rent." She mentioned that to get a waiver just requires a phone call and is an easy process.

WMAFO Ferrets

A typical day for WMAFO foster ferrets is like a typical day in a regular ferret family. The foster ferrets are treated the same as the foster home's personal ferrets while waiting for their own loving family.

WMAFO has more than a few ferrets up for adoption, and they can be found on Petfinder.com. "One bonded pair is Noodle and Lotte," Russell said. "Noodle and Lotte were picked up a couple days short of death row at a local animal control. They are both love bugs and would make a wonderful addition to a family."

Russell described Noodle as a happy-go-lucky, healthy, energetic male, cinnamon ferret that is a year old. Lotte is a young, sweet, gentle, petite, sable, female ferret that gives wonderful kisses, according to Russell.

"We also have a 12-week-old kit at the shelter — Murphy," she added. "He's a bundle of energy that sounds like a freight train when he runs down the hallway. He loves all other ferrets and for a baby has excellent manners. Who doesn't love a baby?"



Ferret Adoption Process

So what is involved in the adoption process through WMAFO? “All adopters have to submit an application through our website and one of the board members calls and interviews them on ferret care and knowledge,” Russell said. “If they have ferrets already, we may call their vet to confirm their pets are up-to-date on vaccines and appear well cared for. Once any outstanding ferret vaccines and ADV testing have been done, we’ll invite the adopter to one of our foster homes for an in-person interview and to meet some ferrets. Most of our adopters take home their new family member that day, or if the ferrets we thought would be a good match for them don’t work out, we’ll schedule another appointment with another foster home or call them when other ferrets are available for adoption.”

Vet Contacts For The Shelter

Dr. Tom Kawasaki
Old Bridge Animal Hospital
Woodbridge, VA

Dr. Gold
Chadwell Animal Hospital
Abingdon, MD

Volunteers are essential to all volunteer organizations and WMAFO is no exception. Russell said that several board members sew bedding, make toys and other handmade items to see sell to raise funds. Sales are often made at ferret shows. “100 percent of our bedding sales go directly to our vet accounts — not just a portion but 100 percent!” Russell said. “WMAFO could certainly use more volunteers to help with shows and local fundraising events.” Those interested in becoming a volunteer can fill out an application at the WMAFO website.

Fundraising isn’t all that volunteers do. They also help educate others about ferrets by giving ferret talks to the staff of local ferret shelters, as was done recently by a volunteer named David, who not only gave a talk but donated some ferret food and bedding to the animal shelter. Russell said, “Thanks to volunteers like David, this animal control is well-versed in ferret care and even acquired a Ferret Nation cage for incoming surrendered ferrets.”

And, of course, volunteers can foster ferrets. Russell gave a list of the most important needs for WMAFO as, “Foster homes, adoptions, volunteers and donations for vet care.”

WMAFO can be found on Facebook and Twitter.

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