

The KC Ferret Hotline

For 17 years, Bobbi McCanse and her Kansas City Ferret Hotline Shelter have helped ferrets.

By Troy Lynn Eckart

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Rocky is one of the ferrets helped by the Kansas City Ferret Hotline shelter.

Photos Courtesy KC Ferret Hotline

Norman is one of the 30 to 40 ferrets currently staying at the KC Ferret Hotline Shelter.

Bobbi McCanse is a go-getter. When she moved to Kansas City, Missouri, and couldn't find ferret resources there, she started her own ferret shelter. The KC Ferret Hotline Shelter opened in 1992. Materials and information from STAR Ferrets and from the Ferret Fanciers Club in Milwaukee helped McCanse launch, but nothing fully prepared her for the reality of running a ferret shelter. "I still had no idea what I was getting into," she said.

After operating for two years with the shelter room in the basement, McCanse added a ferret-specific addition to the main floor of the house in 1994. This addition provides lots of windows for natural lighting, a tile floor for easy cleaning, separate sinks and nearby access to the laundry room.

A typical day at KC Ferret Hotline starts with getting out all the ferrets to play, in rotation. This is the time when cages are cleaned; food and water bottles are freshened; bedding is replaced or laundered; and toys, floors and litter pans are washed. Some days, additional tasks include trips to the veterinarian or meeting and talking with people who think they want to adopt. "We do tons of education in person and on the phone," McCanse said.

About 1,500 ferrets have come through the shelter since it opened in 1992, and it averages 30 to 40 ferrets at a time. The KC Ferret Hotline is currently working with volunteers for a temporary and permanent fostering program in preparation for when McCanse moves out of state after her upcoming retirement.

Photo Courtesy KC Ferret Hotline

Martini and Screwball are a bonded pair that need a ferret-savvy owner.

Meet The Ferrets

Looking to add a couple ferrets to your family? Well, since there are about 30 to 40 to choose from, what about Martini and Screwball? Martini and Screwball came in as part of a group of five. They are about 2 years old and closely bonded. Screwball was quite a handful when he was first purchased, so the family went out and bought him a wife, Martini, and he calmed down. Unfortunately, the family couldn't keep them. These two are escape artists and can climb out of the playpen easily, so they need a secure, ferret-familiar home.

Memories: Happy And Sad

McCanse said one of her greatest ferret-related successes happened several years ago when the Missouri State Health Department confiscated 46 ferrets from a woman. After going to a local humane society for veterinary care, the ferrets arrived at the KC Ferret Hotline. "Suddenly, we had almost 100 ferret foundlings in-house," McCanse said. "Thanks to Troy Lynn [Eckart] and to other shelters around the country, half of them were transported to new situations within a few days. The rest found good homes during the months that followed."

Another success occurred when a ferret arrived at the KC Ferret Hotline with urinary stones that completely blocked his urinary tract. "His abdomen was so swollen that it had begun to bruise," McCanse said. The shelter's veterinarian was able to do emergency surgery that saved the ferret's life, allowing it to live for almost another year.

But not every memory is of a success. In one sad case, McCanse said the shelter took in 10 tiny babies that someone had bred. They told McCanse they didn't realize their ferrets could breed. One mother and five babies had died, and the other mother had mastitis and couldn't feed the babies. "June Phipps, a volunteer, successfully raised four of them and Pamela Stubbs managed to save one other. We lost the remaining five."

Volunteers, Donations And Fundraising

Ferret shelters are always in need of donations, whether it be of money, time or goods. "Right now, I'm short sleep sacks," McCanse said. "We usually have plenty, but we send one home with each ferret that is adopted, and somehow I got behind."



She treasures active volunteers and is happy with the new energy and revitalized club. "But we can always put people to work doing education, caring for fosters, helping sort out the paperwork, washing cages and toys, and maybe sewing sleep sacks," she said. And, as with all shelters, the veterinary bill is a concern. McCanse said the shelter has managed to stay financially stable over the years and believes its nonprofit status has helped with this.

McCanse considers all of her volunteers special. "Sharon has picked up quite a bit of responsibility for reforming the club and managing adoptions as we prepare to retire. Chandra has put lots of energy into redeveloping our website. June continues to handle our mailings to people who need information about ferrets, and she and her husband, Stan, help with our education days at PetSmart. Kathy provides a good foster environment for many of our older ferrets. Others [like Katy] are willing to transport ferrets." And the list goes on. McCanse said she couldn't hope to name everyone who contributes.

Current fundraising efforts include selling products on the website, some of which are quite unique. "Some less-ordinary fundraising efforts have resulted in people actually tithing to the shelter or contributing a percentage of the money they are winning at the casinos," McCanse said.

Dr. Dean Kolich at Antioch Animal Clinic is the primary veterinarian for the KC Ferret Hotline. McCanse can also refer people to other veterinarians in the area who are ferret-knowledgeable.

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Troy Lynn Eckart is the founder of Ferret Family Services, a domestic ferret information, education and welfare public service organization in Kansas.