

Ferrets Are The Focus For A Ferret Club In San Antonio

The San Antonio Ferret Enthusiasts Club began in Texas with one ferret and one family.

By Jennifer Mons McLaughlin

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The founders of the San Antonio Ferret Enthusiasts Club opened a shelter for ferrets in 1993.

Photos Courtesy Candi White

The ferret shelter currently has 61 resident ferrets, which keep shelter operator Candi White busy all day.

When Rick and Candi White's son walked through their door more than two decades ago, they had no idea that the ferret he held in his hands was about to affect their entire future.

"My son brought home our first ferret after the mom of this particular individual said, 'If you don't start taking care of it, get rid of it,'" Candi said. With absolutely no knowledge of ferrets, Candi wasn't particularly excited about this latest development. Her son even offered for the ferret to stay outside. But Candi, having a soft spot for animals, said, "No, no animal is going to be staying outside."

Then, as with so many people, the ferret started to work its magic. "I held her, she was a little albino," Candi said. "And I just fell in love." Foo-Foo, as she soon came to be called, was now part of the White family, and the instigator to a whole new way of life for them. They just didn't know it yet.

The Ferret Club Grows And The Fight To Legalize Ferret Ownership

It didn't take long before the family decided Foo-Foo needed a playmate. The following year, another ferret from the same breeder joined the household, followed by two more. "We were the happy 4 ferret family," Candi said.

In the early nineties, the Whites put an ad in the paper asking any area ferret enthusiasts to contact them. Rick and Candi, along with one other couple who answered their ad, sat around the White's kitchen table and the first meeting — of what is known today as the San Antonio Ferret Enthusiasts (SAFE) — was held.

At the time, there was an ordinance banning ferrets in the city of San Antonio. A humorous bit of history was made when the group was conducting informationals and received approval to go to San Antonio, with the stipulation that they had to be out of the city by sundown.

"At least we were able to go in and educate, because, particularly at that time, it was super, super important," Candi said. With the city council preparing to change the animal ordinance in 1997, club members spoke out. "That is what did the trick," Candi said. In April of 1997, ferrets became legal in San Antonio.

Today's San Antonio Ferret Enthusiasts Club

A lot has changed since those first days. The first meeting involved four people. Today's meetings have regular attendance by 35 to 45 members on a bimonthly basis.

In the early days, the meeting place was the kitchen table. Today, meetings are held in a large American Legion hall where the entire dance floor is covered with big comforters, playpens, baby pools, toys, a ferret fun tower and, most importantly, ferrets!

Meetings revolve around fun, food and ferrets. Veterinarians and guest speakers educate members. Raffles, activities and products add to the entertainment and enjoyment of the meetings.

It's often said the more things change, the more they stay the same. The No. 1 priority of SAFE is still education.

According to Candi, education is still the biggest need today in the ferret community. "People are still going in to the pet shops and saying, 'Oh they're so cute. I have to have one,'" she said. "They spend an exorbitant amount of money, but a lot of people don't do research and realize what they are getting themselves into."

SAFE offers educational programs for children from kindergarten on up in local schools. Ferrets and their



accessories are brought in. Attendees watch demonstrations on how to set up cages and ferret-proof. Many schools may have anywhere from 90 to 100 children attend the sessions, so often the groups are split so age-relevant information can be presented. In the summer months, SAFE works with the Bear County Humane Society in providing educational programs for children 6 years old and up.

Pet shops routinely contact SAFE to offer the same program in stores. This education is not only a huge benefit to the customers, but it helps the employees as well. The educational programs provide many of the employees with information they might not have otherwise acquired.

A Ferret Shelter Is Added

In 1993, Candi began running the SAFE shelter and the educational focus is quite prevalent in the shelter operation. "It keeps us sometimes from getting ferrets we shouldn't," she said. "Many times I'll get a surrender call, and I'll try to feel them out and ask what the problem is." At that point, Candi goes with her instinct to bring the animal in, offer advice or just to listen to the owner. Many times, she is able to offer suggestions and educate the owner to the point that the ferret stays in its home.

Currently 61 ferrets reside at the shelter and 33 are in foster care. That number fluctuates and reached one of its highest levels in 2005, when 93 ferrets lived at the shelter. The days of the "4-ferret family" are long gone, and, according to her husband, Rick, Candi's days are extremely full.

"Morning health checks, meds, feedings, cage cleanings, phone calls, first play groups, etcetera, take up the entire mornings for Candi," he said. "In her spare time, she does the laundry for us and the ferrets, cleans the house and grabs a quick breakfast or brunch. Not a lot of free time, especially when vet appointments and adoption visits are scheduled for that day."

Though the Whites had no way of knowing where that first ferret would lead, they wouldn't have it any other way. "When we decided to do it, we knew what we would be getting in to," Candi said. "We knew the financial commitment. We knew a vet had to be on board for us. We knew this was going to be a huge commitment for a long period of time."

But they also knew how little information and support existed at that time for ferret owners. In short, they recognized the need and their response changed their entire way of life.

Jennifer Mons McLaughlin lives in Minnesota and has been writing about the pet industry for more than 10 years.