

As Pandemic Winds Down, Animal Shelters Fear A Rise Of Surrendered Pets

by Kevin Bessler

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ILLINOIS – They call them “Pandemic Puppies,” pets that were adopted during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic that are now being returned to Illinois animal shelters.

An estimated 23 million people around the country adopted pets in 2020.

Jane Kahman, manager of of the Humane Society of Central Illinois, said county-run shelters all over the area are seeing a spike in returned pets.

“We take in a lot of pets from all over Central Illinois, all the different animal controls, and they are just stuffed to the gills,” Kahman said.

The central Illinois branch has taken in nearly 500 animals this year, she said. Some owners explained that they can’t care for the pet because they are heading back to the office, Kahman said.

“I have this puppy. I’m back to work and I have no time for training,” Kahman said she has been told. “So they will ask to relinquish the pet.”

Erin Buckmaster, director of the Knox County Humane Society, reports they are full as well, but are taking a proactive approach for adoptions on their Facebook page.

In other areas, there doesn’t appear to be a surge in surrendered pets.

“Last year, when COVID was more impactful, the numbers of animals entering shelters fell quite a bit. This year, we are higher than last year, but still not back to the intake numbers that we had seen in years prior to COVID,” said Becky Spencer, director of the Peoria County Animal Protection Services.

At DuPage County Animal Services, operations manager Laura Flamion said intake is steady for dogs and cats, but they have seen a significant increase in the number of unwanted pet rabbits.

“Understand the time and financial resources needed when you bring a pet home,” Flamion said in an email. “Sadly, many of the rabbits we take in have not been provided appropriate food, housing and grooming.”

Buckmaster has a reminder for those who adopted pets last year.

“They were there for you during the pandemic. Now it is time for you to be there for them,” Buckmaster said.