

# Animal Compassion



It seems that every edition of *Checkpoints* contains profiles of graduates performing heroics, participating in acts of service, and finding success in careers that don't seem linearly related to the USAFA experience or active duty service—at least not to many outside of the USAFA community. A unique and local addition to this spectrum of service can be found not far from USAFA's North Gate where Lauri Cross, '81, established the Wild Blue Animal Rescue and Sanctuary (WBARS) on acreage near the home she shares with her husband, Scott Trimboli, '80.

"I have always been an animal lover and wanted to help animals after I retired from the Air Force,"

says Lauri. "It took a while to get things organized after I retired in 2005, but I decided to take the leap and just go for it in late 2009." In Lauri's words, her husband, Scott, has served as "the well-stocked base camp from which to climb this mountain!" She has also had significant support from her Board Members: Karen Eberhart (wife of General Ed Eberhart, Class of 1968 and 2010 Distinguished Graduate), Dr. Cristy Fisher, DVM; and Susanne Hayes, North American Riding for the Handicapped Certified Instructor, and Equine Facilitated Mental Health Specialist.

Since those first days, Lauri's relied on a patchwork of benefactors and helpers to grow WBARS. Her volunteer group includes grads Marty

# Inside the Wild Blue Animal Rescue and Sanctuary

By Col. Martin France, '81

a time, based on square footage. It has four large rooms for cats (not cages) as well as a large play area where cats can run, jump, and climb. The rooms also have pet doors to outdoor kennel areas so the cats can go outside for fresh air or to sun themselves on the grass. Although WBARS doesn't have facilities for dogs yet, Lauri did take on one large dog for whom she was able to find a wonderful Army family to adopt, and she also assists folks with placing dogs they've found or can no longer keep.

Wild Blue's philosophy is the biggest difference between it and other animal rescue organizations in El Paso County. WBARS is a "No Kill" organization that is also energetically trying to help move El Paso County to the same policy. In 2009, El Paso County put down nearly 4,700 cats alone, and over 20,000 were euthanized state-wide.

According to Lauri, "the vast majority of these cats and kittens would have gone on to live happy and healthy lives had they been given the time to find an adoptive home. Often, our animal control facilities are unable or unwilling to give the animals more time to be adopted out. One of the more popular reasons given for the killing is that there just isn't enough room to house the animals, and that there is an overpopulation problem in general. Research by No Kill organizations has found, however, that there are more people looking to add pets to their families than there are animals killed, so the overpopulation excuse is considered a myth by those hoping to save more animal lives."

One of WBARS many goals is also informational: to help the general population understand that far too many pet animals are being killed in our nation's shelters and that the vast majority of these are not mercy killings. The community uses the term "euthanasia" broadly, and many people believe this means putting

France, '81, Julie Kadlubowski, '86, and her husband Mike Kadlubowski, '81, Courtney Hemmert, '06, Bobby Wright, '81, Ross Conrad, '06, and his wife Jill Trimboli Conrad (USNA '07).

Several cadet squadrons have also volunteered their time on community service projects at Wild Blue, and local Boy Scout troops have already completed three Eagle Scout projects there. The USAFA Athletic Department donated a miniature football helmet, autographed by head football coach Troy Calhoun, as well as four tickets to a football game for a silent auction fundraiser earlier this year.

Today, Wild Blue consists of a small facility renovated from a detached four-car garage and is generally authorized to house between 18 and 20 cats at



an animal down for mercy reasons (e.g., put it out of misery due to terminal illness or incurable pain). In fact, “euthanasia” simply means to kill or put down an animal in a humane way—one that does not induce additional pain, fear or discomfort to the animal.

WBARS is part of a network of organizations striving to make the United States a “No Kill” nation by 2015. Lauri cites Mahatma Gandhi who said, “The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.” She adds that, “In order for us to help put El Paso County on the ‘No Kill’ map, we need a facility large enough and appropriate to the task of taking the pressure off our shelters which are overwhelmed with large numbers of animals being surrendered.”

Despite the hardships along the way, Lauri has some special memories. Wild Blue has saved the lives of 50 cats since April 2010. She’s been thrilled by the involvement of local young people (including cadets mentioned above) helping develop the Kitty Community. Furthermore, Pine Creek Veterinary Hospital has been wonderful, providing care of Wild Blue animals at discounted rates. They have also volun-



**Top, L to R: Curious cats are never kept in cages at Wild Blue. Instead, they cohabit in large rooms. Lauri Cross, '81, is the founder of Wild Blue.**

**Bottom: The shelter is home to cats young and old.**



teered their time on Sundays for the WBARS “Snip and Chip” program that aims to provide low cost but high quality spay/neuter for local pets, as well as help with reuniting lost pets with their humans using microchips implanted in the animals.

In the long-term, Lauri sees Wild Blue as a beacon on the hill for animals, as well as animal lovers in the community. The facility is already a wonderful sanctuary where animals feel safe and comfortable in a cage-free environment as they await their forever family to find them and take them home. Future goals include being able to provide veterinary care to any animal who needs it, even those belonging to families who need an extra hand during difficult times. Wild Blue animals will give back to humans by giving them comfort through programs developed to help soldiers, airmen, sailors, marines and coast guardsmen with PTSD and/or other physical and emotional conditions, senior citizens who are lonely but are unable to care for their own pets due to physical conditions or a lack of financial means, and young people who need to learn or practice compassionate leadership.

Lauri envisions a larger facility for the future of Wild Blue. It is her hope to become yet another attraction for our local area, one that will demonstrate compassionate leadership. Until that goal is met, Lauri will continue to accept support from the local community. Wild Blue also is in constant need of towels, kennels, cat food, kitty litter, pet carriers and a constant stream of volunteers willing to

**L to R: Dr. Cristy Fisher provides the much-needed service of spaying and neutering cats. Local volunteers are the lifeblood of Wild Blue. Cadets volunteer at Wild Blue Animal Rescue as part of their civil service.**

open their homes as foster families for pets awaiting permanent placement. Wild Blue is also seeking additional Board Members with skills/knowledge in legal, business, and fundraising areas.

Lauri credits the skills she learned at USAFA and developed over the years during her military career as key to her progress to date and vision for the future. While WBARS is a non-profit rescue, it is still a business that requires leadership, integrity, dedication and service beyond self. The considerable daily challenges of running Wild Blue, while still working full time as a defense contractor with PatchPlus Consulting Inc, demand the sense of balance and the ability to multi-task that she learned as a member of the first group of female cadet candidates at the USAFA Prep School and later at the Academy. She calls on those lessons to help her prioritize her many commitments, remembering that which is most important to her.

You can learn more about Wild Blue Animal Rescue and Sanctuary, as well as make a tax-deductible donation at: [www.wbars.org](http://www.wbars.org). 🟩