

Pathfinder of the Month **Jaime Wilson**

"Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." — Ralph Waldo Emerson

by **Kate Federman**

The Georgia Animal Project (GAP) is a non-profit organization that offers low-cost spay and neuter services for dogs and cats belonging to low-income families, reputable rescue organizations and animal shelters throughout North Georgia. According to www.theanimalproject.org, the ultimate goal of the project is to reduce animal suffering and confront companion-animal overpopulation by directly subsidizing expenses through spay and neuter clinics and proactive education programs. Jaime Wilson has been dedicated to the GAP and to the Cherokee County Animal Shelter for three years. During her numerous volunteer hours, Jaime has significantly changed the lives of local animals by giving them a brighter, healthier future. Cindy Foster, GAP's president, nominated Jaime for Pathfinder of the Month based on her tireless dedication as a volunteer.

Jaime is GAP's spay and neuter program coordinator. She spends 20 hours a week talking to clients about the program and scheduling their animal companions for surgery. After a client fills out the registration form, Jaime completes the necessary paperwork and also contacts the clients the day before a procedure to confirm their appointment. The day of the surgery, Jaime checks in clients and tends to the patients as well.

Jaime has certification in canine behavior and training, and started volunteering at the Cherokee County Animal Shelter three years ago to work with specific dogs that had been at the shelter for more than a year. She helped in the training and socialization skills that had been depleted from the lack of intimate human interaction. This is when Cindy, the director of the animal shelter started GAP and recruited Jaime to help.

Fast forward three years, and you will see a small, non-profit organization that has grown into a huge project which recently sponsored its 1,000th surgery. GAP now offers other services, such as microchip implants and low-cost vaccines, as well as assistance for medical care to injured or ill animals belonging to families with financial difficulties.

"I know that my work with the GAP, as an advocate of spaying and neutering, directly influences the lives of each animal that I schedule to be altered. Statistics prove that a dog or cat that has been spayed or neutered, lives a longer and healthier life and makes for a much better companion. I also am thankful that when I help prevent an animal from reproducing, I have greatly increased the chance of an animal being adopted from a rescue or shelter," Jaime said.

As she was growing up, Jaime deeply connected with critters. She brought home many creatures that crossed her path. She also has

had an extensive list of pets over the years including dogs, cats, lizards, snakes, birds, rats and frogs.

For several years, she focused on herpetology, a branch of zoology specializing in amphibians. Jaime volunteered at the Smithsonian Zoological Park in Washington D.C., where she worked in the Large Mammal House, where the staff managed hippos, rhinos, giraffes and elephants. After falling in love with the large animals, she forgot about the amphibians, attended elephant handling school and began assisting the elephant keepers with bathing, feeding, medication and training. Her husband's job required the family to move, thus ending her elephant-handling days.

Jaime's love of animals soon transferred to dogs. She currently is employed fulltime at the Animal Medical Center of Holly Springs as a customer service representative. She also occasionally assists Col. Potter Cairn Terrier Rescue, a national rescue group, with home visits and transportation.

Jaime has been married to husband Fred for 24 years, and has four furry children; Ozzie, a female Cairn Terrier, Scruffy, a male Cairn Terrier, Max and Rocky, Maine Coons. All of her animals were adopted from the Cherokee County Animal Shelter.

The Rock Hill, South Carolina, native graduated from Winthrop University with a B.S. in Business Administration. In her spare time, Jaime loves shopping for antiques, and enjoys solving Sudoku puzzles, reading and teaching her dogs obscure tricks.

"I find volunteering for GAP satisfying in two ways. First, I love the component of education; it is very rewarding for me to share with clients the importance of spaying and neutering. There are so many social, economical and medical consequences when animals are not altered and most of us do not even think about them. Probably the most satisfying aspect is meeting people who love their animals as much as I love mine," Jaime stated.

Thank you, Jaime, for all you do to make our community a better place to live!



DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO IS LEADING THE WAY?

A Pathfinder is an individual who goes above and beyond through charitable civic or other community work, making a difference in his/her community. Nominees can be of any age, from the young to the old.

If you know someone who fits this criteria, please send an email to editor@townelaker.com.