

Chaffee's Got Heart Community Spotlight: Ark Valley Humane Society

The Chaffee's Got Heart Committee is proud of local businesses and individuals that have gone above and beyond by doing extraordinary things during these uncertain times.

From innovating ways to thrive despite trying circumstances to showering struggling members of our community with generosity to prioritizing the health and safety of our most vulnerable, these businesses and individuals, who have been nominated for this honor by fellow community members, have shown what it really means when we say: **Chaffee's Got HEART.**

Today, we sat down with Amber Van Leuken, Executive Director for Ark-Valley Humane Society to find out how the pandemic has changed operations.

Prior to Covid we were shelter based, before the stay-at-home order, the majority of animals came into our shelters and stayed there until they were adopted or reclaimed by their owners. Once the stay-at-home order came into effect, we shifted to a foster based model of care which is now the standard for the majority of animals in our care. Another big change was that we shifted to virtual services, we first scrambled to get all our forms and service information available through our website and made it possible for people to pay through our website for our services. We now provide counseling and other types of support by phone or video call in doing that we focus more on services by appointment although we are still available for emergencies. We really felt that was a positive shift for the animals because the animals are going to be much happier in a foster home rather than a kennel which is a silver lining and we are able to give more focused one on one individual care for our client. Another shift in our way of doing business last year was to look at what the community needed from us and how that might have changed due to covid. We created a Pet Food pantry which is available free to Chaffee county residents that are in need. We also provide hundreds of pounds of food to the Salida community center that gets distributed monthly for dogs and cats through the food drive.

Why did you decide to go above & beyond to contribute to our community? Our mission is to ensure the welfare of companion animals through compassion and care.

Operating an animal shelter is just one of the things we do. The stay-at-home order affected pet owners in a number of ways. We shifted our focus on improving ways to reach at-risk pets and keep them in homes rather than see them end up at the shelter. Such as expanded behavior, spay & neuter, and boarding support for community pets and established community pet emergency funds.

Where do you see examples of the idea that 'Chaffee's Got Heart'? The most striking example was our call to action to empty the shelter of animals. When the stay-at-home order went into effect, we knew that the safest option for our staff and the community would be to empty the shelter and have our staff work from home as much as possible. We saw that Chaffee's got Heart when an unprecedented number of people stepped up and adopted or fostered the animals in our care. It was incredible to see over a five-day period the entire shelter empty out, there wasn't a single animal in any of the kennels!



What's your biggest takeaway from the past year? While a shelter building will always be needed to receive stray animals, the future of animal welfare is about doing whatever we can to support the human-animal bond. The focus is no longer on animal sheltering, it is about continuing to adapt our programs and services to increase safety nets that keep animals in loving homes. It's about improving the lives of pets who are in need of our community regardless of whether those animals are homeless or those animals are in need of other support services.

Cool Tidbits: What else do you want people to know about you, your business, your contributions to the community, how they can get involved or support you? We are continuing our fundraising events this year as virtual events. Donations and fundraisers make it possible to do the work we do. This spring we will have a virtual Tails on the Trail event and Good Bad Pet Portrait fundraiser. We encourage you to go to our website ark-valley.org or follow us on Facebook to keep informed of opportunities to donate and participate in our events. Also, we are always welcoming new foster families for cats and dogs. Information about all our programs and how to get a hold of us is on our website!

