

Adopting a paw-sitive attitude

Moscow residents turn to animal adoption during the pandemic

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Bright orange fur, a little pink nose, and soft golden eyes. Jeremy Tamsen puts the furry cat named Tiger back into his kennel at the animal shelter as he debates which cat will be his new companion. As the door closes, Tiger is perched and peering at him through the kennel door in obvious anger. Just then, Tamsen knew he had found his new best friend.

COVID-19 has had an immense emotional impact on many Americans across the country. According to Medical News Today, the cases of diagnosed depression in adults in America have tripled since COVID-19 began. This has left many across the United States and Moscow feeling alone and isolated, causing many students and faculty at the University of Idaho to turn to adopt pets during this time of isolation.

This new surge in adoptions has affected local animal shelters. The Whitman County Humane Society (WCHS), an animal shelter in Pullman, is having an unprecedented year of adoptions.

Shelby Vasquez, assistant director of shelter operations at WCHS, said WCHS has had record-breaking adoptions ever since they reopened after the mandatory COVID-19 shut down this summer. Vasquez said they recently hit their all-time adoption high in September with 100 adoptions for that month alone.

One of these new pet owners is Jeremy Tamsen, a faculty member at the University of Idaho.



Jeremy Tamsen stands with his newly adopted cat, Tiger, outside the admin lawn.

Tamsen adopted his kitten, Tiger, in October. After transitioning to working remotely, Tamsen decided that it would be the perfect time to adopt a pet. With more hours at home, he could help the pet adjust, even train his future cat to be able to walk on a harness.

To find his new pet, Tamsen visited a shelter. Tamsen looked at a few different kittens available at the shelter, bringing them out to play with them and putting them back in their kennels. But after playing with Tiger something was different.

Tamsen said once he put Tiger back to play with another cat, he glanced back at the kitten to find it was staring back at him in "obvious anger."

"He was looking at me like, 'What are you doing, man?'" Tamsen said. "I thought we had a thing going."

That was enough for Tamsen to decide the cat was meant to be his, and he brought Tiger home.

Since taking Tiger home, Tamsen said he has enjoyed having Tiger around. Tiger has been wonderful to train and Tamsen is able to take Tiger outside on a leash, providing him with a source of entertainment and happiness.

Tiger enjoying the outdoors while on a leash.

"He was out in the snow crawling around," Tamsen said. "He's just been such a great sport about that. He just goes for it! He's very interested... He's very adventurous."

The adventurous spirit of animals can be a safe haven for pet owners during the COVID-19 stay-at-home orders.

Shani Sullivan, assistant director of Fraternity and Sorority Life at UI, has looked to break-up the quarantine boredom with her new dog, Daize.

Sullivan was hesitant at first to adopt a new pet after a difficult experience adopting a puppy as an undergraduate, eventually giving it up because of limited time to care for it. She was determined to make sure that this time, that if she adopted a puppy, she would have ample time to take care of it.

After planning to get a dog for a year, Sullivan decided the pandemic made for a perfect time to take on the responsibility of adopting a new dog. But Sullivan said she wanted to find a dog that matched her lifestyle, one that was relaxed and already trained. And luckily, this summer, she found a dog which fit all those boxes — Daize.

Daize was already a few years old, making her transition into Sullivan's life "seamless." After learning each other's boundaries and habits, Sullivan said they have fallen into a nice rhythm. Now, Sullivan said she's noticed a change in her own life because of Daize.

"I take more time for myself and make sure that I have a healthy work-life balance, which I did not have to focus too much about before," Sullivan said. "I could work 12 hours a day and not have to leave my office. However, now I make sure to walk her each day and make sure she eats on a regular schedule. It may seem strange, but it has made me realize how much time I spend working or focused on technology because she also wants my attention."

Besides improving how Sullivan manages work, Sullivan said Daize has also helped her mental well-being.

"She has overall contributed to (me) being happier living in a smaller town with less support," Sullivan said. "Being far away from family, and having a limited support network is difficult, but she makes me more excited to come home and explore different areas around Moscow."

COVID-19 also provided the perfect break UI student Michaela McSweeney needed to adopt a pet.

Mikaeyla Mcsweeney holds her kitten, Shiva, outside of her house.

After considering adopting a pet for over a year, McSweeney decided that COVID-19 provided her the perfect opportunity to do so. With more time at home, McSweeney said she knew it would be a great time to help her new cat adjust, and after reaching out to friends and family, McSweeney stumbled upon a social media post of a group of kittens covered in fleas and in need of a good home. McSweeney said she knew she needed to adopt one.

Now bathed, settled and completely adjusted to her new home, the kitten, Shiva, is thriving. But McSweeney said that Shiva is far from the only one benefiting from the relationship, she is also noticing an improvement in herself.

Shiva, just a few months old, handles being in a new environment well, especially in the comfort of her owner's lap.

McSweeney said the kitten has provided her with a much-needed break from technology, spending more time with the kitten, time she would normally be spending watching TV. She said the kitten is quickly becoming the best part of her day.

"I feel excited to come home and see her," McSweeney said. "When there's nothing for me to do, I have someone to play and be silly with."

This search for joy that so many pets provide their owners was also the driving factor for UI student Elijah Favela to adopt a kitten.

Favela said that he had been struggling with depression recently, fueled by the new stressors of the pandemic. In search of a way to lift his spirits, Favela looked to adopt a kitten.

This August, Favela decided to take the plunge and adopt his new kitten, Juniper. Since then, Favela has seen a drastic change in his own mental well-being.

Elijah holds his kitten while she's in her costume, in honor of it being Halloween.

"Juniper is my emotional support animal," Favela said. "She knows when I'm feeling low and won't leave my side until she's sure I'm okay. If I hadn't gotten her, I know that my mental health would be in a much worse place."

Favela said she has provided him with a source of motivation, and on days where his depression is "getting the best of him," she provides him with the determination to get up and get through the day so he can take care of her.

Elijah and his roommate hold their kitten in front of the admin building, petting her to keep her at ease in a new environment.

This role of motivation is exactly why UI student Kate Misura said she adopted her dog.

Misura adopted her dog, Cleo, over the summer through a friend. At first, Misura said raising a puppy was challenging, but that the challenge has been worth it.

Misura said Cleo is a great motivator to get outside and exercise, taking her on two or three walks every day.

"She is the perfect excuse for me to get outside every day," Misura said. "That's my favorite thing about (her) so far. It's been such a good reason to get outside and explore all the trails around Moscow, and that's been really, really fun."

Kate Misura's puppy enjoys the car ride home, seated on the console of the car.

Misura said Cleo has changed a lot of aspects of her life, but all for the better.

"I'm a morning person now it's because she wakes me up at the morning," Misura said. "I can never sleep in again. It's great because I've always wanted to be (a morning) person, I've just never had a driving motivator until now."

With the wag of a tail, or excitement to go on a walk, pets are providing much-needed stability during this unstable time.

But the benefits aren't limited to just humans.

Ashley Phelps, an employee at WCHS said many of the animals adopted are the ones most in need of a good home.

"I would definitely get that when we get the (animals) that are really sick, or just have a bad backstory, and we get them to the point where they can be adopted and they find that really perfect home, that's probably one of the best moments that you could ever be a part of."

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