Going Mobile

**New smartphone app lets people connect
with a Kansas City shelter wherever they go**

BY JIM BAKER

Nick the dog found a new home when Marla Svoboda, vice president of marketing and development for Wayside Waifs, showed her friend Marsha Reynolds (right) some of the shelter's adoptable pets on a new smartphone app.

Marsha Reynolds wasn't ready to adopt.

She'd lost her old dog Henry, who was more than 17, not long ago, and she was still grieving. But that didn't stop her longtime friend Marla Svoboda from keeping an eye out for a potential furry friend.

Svoboda's job as vice president of development and marketing for Wayside Waifs, an animal shelter in Kansas City, Mo., keeps sweet, furry faces in her view all the time. But when she whipped out her smartphone at lunch to show her friend the shelter's new adoption application (or "app," software designed for handheld devices and mobile phones), Reynolds saw through the bells and whistles.

"I said, 'Look at our cool, new app. It does this, and it does this, and you can even donate. You want to look at some animals?'" Svoboda recalls. "She was just window shopping, and she looked at a little dog whose name was Potter, and she just got tears in her eyes. She said, 'This is the one.' It's amazing that it would happen on a 4-inch screen, but it did. She stopped in her tracks and said, 'I have to meet this dog.'"

Using her smartphone, Svoboda, who has administrative access to the application, put a hold on the dog right then. Two days later, Reynolds, who lives in Topeka, drove 60 miles to the shelter to adopt her new dog.

The interaction—and the resulting adoption—went exactly as shelter staff and the app developers had hoped. Having real-time information about adoptable pets on a mobile device, Svoboda was able to use a random moment to help forge an instant connection.

That opportunity would likely have been lost if not for the new app, which Wayside Waifs launched last winter. If Svoboda had simply suggested that her friend go home and check out the adoptable pets on the shelter's website, the idea might have been put on a back burner. "It was during the Christmas holidays, I was busy, and chances are that I would not have gone home [and checked the website]," Reynolds says.

The app, which cost about $6,000 and took six months to develop, offers more than a constantly updated stream of photos and details of adoptable pets. It features almost all the content and functionality of the shelter's website, optimized for a small screen. "It's the best pieces of their site, in an app environment that makes it totally friendly to the mobile phone user," says Eric Jacobsen, vice president of media development for Ascend Integrated Media. The Overland Park, Kan.-based company worked with Wayside Waifs to develop the app.

People can use the app to learn about the shelter's adoption process, so they know what to expect when they come to look for a pet. They can find out about volunteer opportunities, explore the services the shelter offers, follow Wayside Waifs on Twitter, read updated blog posts, donate money right from their phones—and see all the adoptable pets, of course.

The smartphone app allows visitors to access online content even when they're not around their computers.

Since nearly 75 percent of people who come to Wayside Waifs to adopt an animal visit the shelter's website first, Svoboda says, staff members want them to be able to access the online content even if they're not around their computers. The goal is threefold: increase adoptions; promote awareness of the shelter and its mission; and attract donations.

The app, which is free to download, works with all smartphone platforms, including iPhone, Blackberry, and Android. (At press time, the app had been downloaded more than 2,000 times.) There are no other nonprofits in the Kansas City area that have anything like it, according to Svoboda and Jacobsen.

Reynolds, meanwhile, is thrilled with the pup—now called Nick—she found. "He's wilder than a March hare," she says, laughing. "My goodness, you have no idea. And he's just changed my whole life. Half the time I'm going nuts, and half the time I'm looking at him thinking, 'I don't know how I ever got along without you.'" **AS**

To download the app, go to wayside.mwap.at *on your mobile browser, or search for "Wayside Waifs" in your app store. And let us know if your group is developing an app of its own!*