



Inside DAKIN

A NEWSLETTER ABOUT ANIMALS AND THE PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT THEM

FALL 2026

RUSTY ▲

A NOTE FROM MEG

Every day at Dakin, we ask ourselves a simple question: How can we do more for the animals and people who depend on us?

The stories in this issue reflect the answer. We continue to evolve, finding new ways to provide the best possible care for animals while strengthening our impact throughout the community. From preventing unwanted litters through The Big Fix, to inspiring future veterinarians at our Youth Veterinary Day, to sharing our expertise with fellow veterinary professionals by hosting hands-on surgical workshops, we are constantly looking for ways to make a difference.

We are also expanding how we care for every animal who comes through our doors—recognizing their emotional, nutritional, medical, and behavioral needs so they can truly thrive. And through partnerships like our UMass internship program, we are helping prepare the next generation of compassionate animal care professionals.

None of this work happens without you. Your generosity gives us the ability to innovate, collaborate, and provide life-changing care for animals like Rusty, Shakira, and Alexi, and so many others whose stories begin at Dakin.

Thank you for believing in our mission and for helping us continue to grow, learn, and lead. Together, we are creating a better future for animals and the people who love them.

With gratitude,



Meg Talbert
Executive Director
Dakin Humane Society



A Village FOR RUSTY



When Rusty first crossed paths with Dakin's Kitten Street Team volunteer Ali Johnstone last winter, he was simply trying to survive. The 5-year-old buff/white cat had been left behind when his family moved away and was relying on a neighbor for food. Ali noticed an injured back foot, but Rusty wouldn't let anyone get close enough to help.

Just before a blizzard and sub-zero temperatures arrived, Ali was finally able to safely trap him. Knowing he wouldn't survive the storm with untreated injuries, she brought him home until the roads reopened. As she and her partner, Ryan, patiently earned Rusty's trust, they discovered his injuries were far worse than they first appeared, including a serious puncture wound on his chest.

When Rusty arrived at Dakin, the team immediately went to work. Within an hour, he was receiving pain medication, fluids, and a surgical treatment plan. Despite the added challenge of testing positive for Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV), Rusty slowly began to heal.

His emotional recovery took just as much care. Dakin's Cat TLC+ volunteers helped him rebuild his confidence through gentle companionship, and later he spent time in Director of Development and Marketing Molly Biechele's office, where he gradually transformed from a frightened, withdrawn cat into one who cautiously greeted visitors.

In early June, Rusty found the quiet, loving home he needed with Melissa.

Rusty's journey is a reminder that healing takes a village. Thanks to the generosity of Dakin's supporters, every step—from rescue and medical care to comfort, patience, and love—was possible. Because of you, animals like Rusty don't just survive. They get the bright future they deserve.

ANNA'S BIG IDEA

At 12 years old, Anna Banas-Chen saw an opportunity to inspire the next generation of veterinarians—and decided to do something about it.

A lifelong animal lover with dreams of becoming a veterinarian, Anna recognized that the rising generation had limited opportunities to explore the profession. “I hope this effort helps more young people learn about veterinary careers early, inspires future veterinarians, and helps create a better world for animals and the people who love them,” Anna shared.

Working with State Representative Angelo Puppolo, Jr., Anna helped turn her idea into action, leading to the creation of **Veterinary Youth Day in Massachusetts**. Mere weeks before turning 13, she celebrated the first-ever event at Dakin, where young animal enthusiasts gathered to explore veterinary medicine.

In addition, Anna has authored two children's books—*Rainbow the Cat: Makes New Friends* and *Rainbow the Cat: Goes to the Farm*.

Anna's passion and determination are proof that one idea, and one person—no matter the age—can create meaningful change.



Inspiring Tomorrow's VETERINARIANS

On May 2, Dakin Humane Society welcomed **25 aspiring animal lovers, ages 10 to 15**, for a morning of hands-on learning in celebration of Massachusetts' first-ever Veterinary Youth Day.

This milestone became a reality thanks to the vision of Anna Banas-Chen, who recognized that aspiring veterinary professionals had very few opportunities to explore the profession (see sidebar story to learn more about Anna).

To celebrate the inaugural event, Anna joined participants at Dakin, where she welcomed the group before they rotated through four interactive learning stations led by Dakin's veterinary team.

They practiced bandage wrapping, explored animal intake exams, learned how to read X-rays, and even tried their hand at suturing using bananas. At the end of the event, every participant received a certificate recognizing their new skills and curiosity about animal care.

Veterinary Youth Day is about more than one memorable morning. With a nationwide shortage of veterinarians projected in the coming years, inspiring the next generation has never been more important. Dakin is proud to support Anna's vision by opening doors for young people who dream of caring for animals and helping them imagine what's possible.

Thanks to the generosity of Dakin's supporters, programs like Veterinary Youth Day encourage tomorrow's animal care professionals while strengthening the future of compassionate veterinary medicine.



Stopping THE CYCLE

Every spring, Dakin Humane Society prepares for kitten season—a time when unwanted litters stretch shelter resources and create challenges for families and animals alike. This year, Dakin focused on preventing those litters before they're born.

The Big Fix is a community outreach initiative that provides cat spay and neuter surgeries for just \$25 to residents of Springfield's 01105, 01108, and 01109 ZIP codes. Those neighborhoods were selected after Dakin identified a clear need. Together, they accounted for 17% of the shelter's animal intake, but only 5% of pets seen through Dakin's Community Spay/Neuter Clinic.

Making The Big Fix a reality required a true team effort. Staff and volunteers distributed bilingual flyers throughout community centers, food pantries, housing authorities, animal control agencies, and other local partners. Dakin also contacted Pet Health Center clients and Pet Food Aid Program participants whose cats had not yet been spayed or neutered.

Once the information reached the community, appointments quickly filled. "We were really trying to get visibility on this happening and get the information out to human services organizations in the area," said Community Engagement Manager Kaitlyn Holloway. "The flyers went out, people responded, joined the wait list, and our Spay/Neuter team reached out to book them."



At the first Big Fix event in May, Dakin performed 58 surgeries, including 38 female cats whose future litters were prevented before they could begin.

The Big Fix is more than a one-day event. It's an ongoing effort to bring affordable veterinary care to neighborhoods where it's needed most, helping keep pets healthy, families together, and fewer kittens entering shelters.

Thanks to Dakin's supporters, innovative programs like **The Big Fix are creating lasting change**—one cat, one family, and one neighborhood at a time.



Investing IN THE FUTURE

At Dakin, caring for animals also means investing in the people who will shape the future of animal welfare.

This spring, Dakin partnered with the new UMass Springfield Internship Program, a collaboration designed to give college students meaningful, hands-on professional experience while helping nonprofit organizations benefit from their skills and fresh perspectives.

From February through May, Dakin welcomed three UMass Amherst students: Anthony, a marketing intern; Keira, a volunteer administration intern; and Anya, a Pet Health Center intern. Each student contributed to important projects while gaining insight into the many career paths available in animal welfare.

"This new internship partnership with UMass was a huge success across the board," said Community Engagement



Manager Kaitlyn Holloway. "The students gained real-world work experience in the nonprofit sector and brought fresh perspectives to our programs."

The partnership was such a success that Dakin plans to welcome additional interns in the future. By mentoring the next generation of professionals, Dakin is helping ensure compassionate, high-quality care for animals for years to come.

Better TOGETHER



When 4-year-old Husky/Alaskan Malamute siblings Shakira and Alexi arrived at Dakin in April, they brought all the traits their breed is known for: intelligence, boundless energy, and a love of adventure. They had also been inseparable since birth.

At first, the plan was to find each dog a home of their own. But it quickly became clear that Shakira was deeply distressed whenever she was separated from Alexi. The team realized they weren't simply looking for two adopters—they were searching for one special home willing to welcome them both.

As the weeks passed, Dakin's staff worked to address each dog's individual needs. Alexi began displaying anxious behaviors that raised concerns about his adoptability, but after careful evaluation, the team determined his medication—not his personality—was likely the cause. Once it was discontinued, his behavior improved dramatically.

Finding the right adopter remained a challenge. Shakira and Alexi needed a home without children or other pets, and someone who understood the exercise, enrichment, and secure environment these clever escape artists require. Even with extensive outreach, a foster placement, and a waived adoption fee, the search took time.

Forty-nine days after arriving at Dakin, the perfect match finally appeared. Stephany, an experienced Husky owner, welcomed both dogs into her home together—just as they had always belonged.

Stories like Shakira and Alexi's remind us that every animal deserves an outcome based on what's best for them, not what's easiest. Thanks to the generosity of Dakin's supporters, we're able to give animals the time, care, and opportunities they need to find the right home.



Treating the WHOLE ANIMAL

At Dakin, helping an animal thrive means looking beyond the basics. Every animal who comes through our doors has unique emotional, nutritional, medical, and behavioral needs—and our care plans are designed to address them all.

This holistic approach began with a program focused on at-risk kittens, where staff saw how animals flourished when every aspect of their well-being was considered together. Today, that same philosophy guides care for all Dakin animals, regardless of species, age, or circumstance.

“Behaviorally, emotionally, medically—we’re looking at all of those different perspectives with every animal,” explained Mary Jane McGuire, senior manager of shelter operations. “We adjust our approach to care based on what we are seeing in the shelter.”



That means providing enrichment and companionship, creating low-stress environments, tailoring nutrition, addressing medical needs, and carefully matching each animal with the right adopter. Volunteers play an important role through foster care, enrichment programs, and a variety of activities that provide comfort, companionship, and support, helping animals build confidence while they wait for their next home.

By treating each animal as an individual, Dakin is able to provide more thoughtful, effective care—helping every pet become healthier, happier, and better prepared for their next chapter.

Sharing Knowledge, SAVING LIVES

Dakin Humane Society has long been committed to finding innovative ways to improve animal care—and that includes sharing what we’ve learned with fellow veterinary professionals.

In October 2025 and April 2026, Dakin hosted two hands-on surgical workshops in collaboration with the Massachusetts Veterinary Medical Association (MVMA). Each workshop welcomed six veterinarians to Dakin’s Community Spay/Neuter Clinic, where they learned techniques designed to increase surgical efficiency in high-volume spay/neuter settings.

Led by Dakin veterinarian Dr. Sherri Therrien, with support from veterinary colleagues including Dr. Rosario Delgado-Lecároz of Second Chance Animal Services and Dr. Elizabeth Helton of Dakin, participants practiced techniques in both classroom and surgical settings.

“The benefit of the workshop is twofold,” explained Dr. Therrien. “We are teaching area veterinarians surgical techniques that will decrease surgical and anesthetic time for their patients. Also, by having the area veterinarians join us at Dakin, they can see what it is we do at our spay/neuter clinic, and the methods we use to safely accomplish numerous surgeries each day.”

By opening its doors and sharing expertise, Dakin continues to serve as a resource for the veterinary community while helping more professionals provide high-quality spay/neuter care.



Veterinarians learn new techniques to enhance spay/neuter care at Dakin’s hands-on workshop.

PET PHOTO ²⁰²⁷ Contest

DAKIN HUMANE SOCIETY

Support animals in need while celebrating the pet you love!

Dakin's annual Pet Photo Contest and 2027 Calendar fundraiser gives you the chance to enter your favorite pet photo, collect votes, and compete for a spot on the calendar cover or one of the featured monthly pages. Every entry and vote helps fund Dakin's lifesaving programs and services.

Scan the QR code to learn more, enter the contest, or preorder your 2027 calendar.



SCAN THE QR CODE TO REGISTER NOW!

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11

FORT HILL BREWERY, EASTHAMPTON

12:00 - 1:00 p.m. – VIP exclusive preview hour

1:00 - 4:00 p.m. – General admission

MUST BE AT LEAST 21 YEARS OLD

\$65 – VIP tickets (\$75 after August 31)

\$25 – General admission tickets (\$35 after August 31)



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