

Ready to adopt

These are just a few of the more than 16,000 animals that have landed at Lee County Animal Services in the past year. They are currently available for adoption but will have to be euthanized as new ones arrive. Last year, the county agency euthanized close to 11,000 animals. For more information, contact call Animal Services at 432-2083 or visit www.LeeLost-Pets.com

Cats

>>Name: Princess ■ **ID:** 376492 ■ **Details:** This four-month-old female is a rarity as most orange cats are male. She was left in Animal Services' night cage.

>>Name: Missy ■ **ID:** 373769 ■ **Details:** With a beautiful medium-length silver coat, Missy is velvety smooth and loves to be held. The one-year-old cat was surrendered by her owner because she wasn't eating well.

>>Name: Stevie ■ **ID:** 260099 ■ **Details:** A handsome boy with a tortoise coat, 5-year-old Stevie likes to play fetch with paper balls. He was tuned in to Animal Services because his owner didn't time for a pet.

>>Name: Sandy ■ **ID:** 374922 ■ **Details:** A lynx point Siamese mix, Sandy is a young male looking for a loving home.

>>Name: Garth ■ **ID:** 376422 ■ **Details:** Garth is a gray and white tabby that was left in Animal Services' night cage by his owner.

>>Name: Dexter ■ **ID:** 376568 ■ **Details:** At 4 months old, Dexter is a vocal little boy who loves attention.

>>Name: Tinkerbell ■ **ID:** 376390 ■ **Details:** Tinkerbell is a beautiful, one-year-old Maine coon whose owner surrendered her.

>>Name: Tux ■ **ID:** 370625 ■ **Details:** Given up by her owner, Tux is an 18-month-old who enjoys being petted.

>>Name: Bella ■ **ID:** 377385 ■ **Details:** A blue tabby, Bella and



Tux 370625

Sandy 374922

Tinkerbell 376390

Garth 376422



Dexter 376568

Nina 377384

Bella 377385

Missy 373769



Princess 376492

Stevie 260099

Bentley 291369

Juicy 345838



Audi 365907

Halley 375127

Mars 375333

Harvey 376380



Red 376607

Henry 376901

Stripe 376993

Sheba 377757

her siblings like to groom one another and play. She was given up because her owner had too many cats.

>>Name: Nina ■ **ID:** 377384 ■ **Details:** Along with her sister Bella and two other kittens, this lynx point female wound up at Animal Services because her owner had too many cats.

Dogs

>>Name: Halley ■ **ID:**

375127 ■ **Details:** A small pug/beagle mix, Halley is an affectionate little dog that was picked up as a stray.

>>Name: Stripe ■ **ID:** 376993 ■ **Details:** A hound mix with a white racing stripe on his face, Stripe is a fun-loving puppy.

>>Name: Henry ■ **ID:** 376901 ■ **Details:** Henry is a young pug mix who was picked up as a stray.

>>Name: Bentley ■ **ID:** 291369 ■ **Details:** This 2-year-old great Dane is gentle, affectionate and sits on command. He was given up because his owner's landlord wouldn't allow him to keep the dog.

>>Name: Audi ■ **ID:** 365907 ■ **Details:** A pit bull mix, Audi is a friendly little female whose tail wags at the slightest attention. She was picked up as a stray.

>>Name: Juicy ■ **ID:** 345838 ■ **Details:** A 10-month-old female hound mix, Juicy was confiscated by Animal Services.

>>Name: Red ■ **ID:** 376607 ■ **Details:** This little beagle is shy but loves attention and would blossom in a loving home.

>>Name: Sheba ■ **ID:** 377757 ■ **Details:** At 8 weeks of age, this little German shepherd/

Labrador mix was given up by an owner who had too many dogs.

>>Name: Mars ■ **ID:** 375333 ■ **Details:** Mars is a one-year-old beagle mix who is lively and loves to play.

Rabbit

>>Name: Harvey ■ **ID:** 376380 ■ **Details:** This fuzzy male bunny is about 18 months old.

EUTHANIZED

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by someone who clearly cared about them, as evidenced by the two-page letter she wrote describing their sweet personalities and how they'd scamper into bed each night when she called them. But her landlord banned them and the owner was unable to find them another home or a private shelter with room to accept them.

There's Spike, a lively young German shepherd/Labrador mix, whose owner dropped him off when he moved out of town.

And, in the holding area, a Chihuahua stares sadly through his chain-link door of his concrete run, looking for an owner who gave him up because, at 8 years old and with a touch of gray coloring his snout and eyebrows, he's "too old."

Shifting fortunes

In recent years, natural disasters and economic hard times have further damaged man's relationship with his companion animals: First came hurricanes such as Charley and Katrina and now rampant home foreclosures and unemployment are forcing people to give up their pets.

"Owner surrenders are going up," says Ria Brown, spokeswoman for Lee County Animal Services. "Many people can no longer afford to care for their pets."

Then there are owners who let their pets breed; only to discover they can't find homes for the offspring.

"Instead of spaying or neutering, they bring the animals to the shelter then blame the shelter because it didn't get the pets a home," Brown says.

It's a Gordian knot: By law, the shelter must hold strays for five days and quarantined animals for twice that long. Because it's a public shelter, the law also requires it to accept all the animals that come in. With room for about 250 at a time, there's only a limited amount of space left for those voluntarily surrendered by owners.

"It won't make a difference if the owned animal is more adoptable. The law requires us to keep strays for 5 days," Brown says. "If people absolutely have to surrender a pet, they should exhaust all other possibilities before bringing it to a government shelter because our hands are tied."

Private, non-profit shelters don't euthanize for space so they are generally full, too.


"If we could turn some of our pets over to another shelter that would be an easy thing, but there's no easy fix," Brown says.

The grim result: More than two-thirds of the animals surrendered by owners last year were euthanized.

On the front lines

The county-run Animal Services department fights the pet overpopulation battle on as many fronts as possible.

It's long promoted adoption and offered vouchers good toward discounted pet sterilization at many private veterinary hospitals. The staff makes regular appearances at schools and club meetings to educate people about responsible pet ownership and the crisis of pet over-



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