

Twins love animals

Written by SARAH McCRAW
Wednesday, 20 March 2013 18:06

Humane Society staff members Rachelle and Cherisse LeJeune look alike and, when it comes to animals, think alike—they love them!

When Rachelle LeJeune meets a new volunteer at the Wisconsin Humane Society's Ozaukee campus in Saukville, she warns them not to be offended if she passes them without a hello. It is probably her identical twin sister Cherisse.

“They are pleasantly surprised when I mention it at orientation,” Rachelle said. “Since I wear business casual attire most of the time, and Cherisse wears scrubs, it’s easy for the volunteers to tell us apart. However, it’s on the days that we both wear scrubs or both wear business casual that they sometimes confuse us.”

The sisters said one of the volunteers even bought them matching necklaces with the letters C and R to wear so they could tell the women apart.



The LeJeune sisters, 26, have worked at the Ozaukee Humane Society for the past five years, fulfilling their passion for animals by working alongside one another with the goal of helping thousands of pets find homes.

Their enthusiasm for all creatures big and small developed as they grew up on a farm outside of Kewaskum, where they still live today.

There is no shortage of animals at their home — Rachelle owns three dogs, two cats and four horses and Cherisse has one dog, three cats and three horses.

“The cats sleep with the dogs. They’re just one big family,” said Cherisse, who often brings one of her dogs to the shelter to participate in children’s programs.

Their parents, Cherie and the late Gene LeJeune, introduced the girls to horses at an early age.

The siblings were leaders in the Equestrian Saddle Club and members of the Washington County 4-H growing up.

They continued to ride and show horses while attending DePauw University in Indiana.

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Even though the twins have always been close — they roomed together and volunteered at the same humane society in college — they did spend time apart from each other when Rachelle attended a different university for one year.

“I think that was nice because it gave us a year to appreciate each other,” Cherisse said. “Our parents were very supportive of us and wanted us to have our own lives, but because we’re so close, we’re such a good team.”

The two graduated with matching bachelor’s degrees in communications in 2008.

Rochelle was hired at the Wisconsin Humane Society after graduation and Cherisse started a few months later.

The sisters now have offices next to each other and credit their close relationship for making them great business partners.

“One of the questions they asked us when Cherisse was interviewing was, ‘Do you think you could work well together being that you’re siblings?’ We said, ‘We’re best friends. We get along really well. We work well together,’” Rachelle said.

Cherisse said, “I think it helps, too, that we’re not the competitive types where we knock heads. We’re very supportive of each other and we want to see each other succeed.”

As the volunteer coordinator, Rachelle works with nearly 400 people.

She said the volunteers’ passion for the animals speaks volumes about the community.

“I’m so impressed with the county for stepping up and supporting the Humane Society in some way. It’s really impressive,” Rachelle said. “You look at the volunteers and think ‘Here is another great member of the community that’s going to be an ambassador for animals too.’”

Rachelle said she really noticed the commitment of the community when the Humane Society shuttered its Grafton shelter and built the Saukville facility in 2011.

“I think they realized that we needed a larger volunteer pool to keep it running,” she said, adding that volunteers are required to make a six-month commitment, but often work beyond that time.

Cherisse works as the adoption team leader training counselors, working with clients and promoting adoptable animals.

While she likes working with the animals, Cherisse said she really enjoys meeting people at community events.

When a resident spots the Humane Society booth at events, the sisters often hear how county residents are connected to the shelter.

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“There are so many people in this community that have adopted pets. Many people at parades or festivals come up to us with their dogs and tell us about their pets that they’ve adopted from us,” Cherrisse said. “I love that aspect about the community and getting to hear the stories of how they’ve adopted.”

The LeJeunes said seeing each other’s enthusiasm inspires them on a daily basis.

“I just love the energy and commitment that Rachelle has for the volunteer program,” Cherrisse said. “When I first started volunteering, we had 180 volunteers in the old building and she knew every single one of their names.”

“Rachelle really cares, not only about how they can help the animals, but also what the volunteers can gain out of it, too,” Cherrisse said.

Being able to depend on her sister in times of need is one of the greatest benefits to working with a sibling, Rachelle said.

“It’s just nice to know that there’s somebody here who is very similar to me and my outlook on the job,” Rachelle said. “We’re a team, so I know that if I have an event that I’m going to or planning for, I can count on Cherrisse to get up at 5 a.m. to help me load a truck. She’s just as passionate about things as I am.”

The women said they are thankful for the opportunity to work together on a daily basis.

“I think we always thought that we’d be working with animals, but not necessarily together,” Cherrisse said.

Rachelle said, “Working together has really strengthened our bond as well.”

Image Information: Identical twins Rachelle (left) and Cherrisse LeJeune each held a shepherd-collie mix puppy. Photo by Sam Arendt

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