Many hands make light work... Groups, students pick up Rabbit Advocate message to help spread the word

Rabbit Advocates is a unique organization. While a search for cat and dog education organizations will yield multiple groups in a community, there are simply fewer people focused on helping pet rabbits. But thanks to efforts by a group of students and an organization in Spokane, Washington, education of pet rabbits is finding new audiences. Word is spreading about these delightful pets and the dedication it requires to take care of them. Rabbit Advocates would like to highlight two of these efforts and thank participants for their hard work.

Rabbitron takes message of pet rabbit care to the streets with public education campaign
By Sarah Yasutake

Rabbitron is a nonprofit organization in Spokane, Washington, that aims to educate the public about rabbits. Since 2005, Rabbitron has taken our print, billboard, busboard, and television advertisements with the message that rabbits are a real responsibility, not an Easter toy. Tracy Martin is the woman behind the visually striking ads. I interviewed Tracy and found the answers to my questions so compelling and interesting that I have included here the entirety of our conversation.

RA: I understand that Rabbitron was the name of your first rabbit. Can you tell me about how you came to adopt her, and the kinds of things you wish you’d known at that time?

TM: I bought Rabbitron from a county fair in Durango, Colorado. She was a mini lop that I named after watching the original “Tron” movie. I loved her very much but had no idea how to properly care for her. I did bring her inside at times, but mostly kept her in a hutch, fed her the wrong foods, never got her spayed, and had no idea how to deal with her psychological needs. And although I thought I was taking good care of her at the time, after she was gone and after learning more about rabbits I realized my mistakes. So I named my campaign in her honor and memory.

RA: What gave you the idea to do an educational advertising campaign? Do you work in advertising? Do you design the ads yourself?

TM: I did work in advertising, I am a graphic designer for my day job. After taking in dozens of unwanted rabbits I realized I could not continue to keep them all in. One day it occurred to me that I could take my knowledge and do a public service type campaign to try and educate the public on my own. I strongly believe that education is the key and if people saw these ads it may plant a seed, or inspire them to learn more. So, with a little help from my friends, I created a website, billboards, and ads too.

RA: Where have you placed the ads?

TM: I have placed print ads in a local weekly newspaper, I have also booked a couple of billboards, busboards and even TV public service announcements that were originally created for Make Mine Chocolate starring Rich Little. In the past, I have also had ads in a local pet magazine and a local kids’ magazine.

RA: How have people responded to the ads? Have people contacted you after seeing one of them?

TM: The response is hard to gauge. Truthfully, I don’t usually get a direct response from them (unless it’s an angry rabbit breeder). I am not able to track sales like it would be possible if it were for a product or something. But this will be my tenth year of my campaign, and I do know the message is getting out there. I get word back in roundabout ways—friends

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Many hands make light work… continued from front page

tell me of stories they hear from people who have seen the ads. Also I get word from people, often when I meet someone and tell them I rescue rabbits that person may tell me about the ads they saw not knowing it was me that posted them!

Tracy hopes to inspire others to create rabbit PSAs of their own, and says she looks forward to “a day rabbit public service announcements are across the nation!” For more information, please visit Rabbitron.com.

Chocolate bunnies encouraged… Beaumont students creatively spread important messages about pet rabbits

By Leann Bleakney

A team of four sixth-grade Beaumont Middle School students have focused on the plight of rabbits bought for Easter gifts—and later abandoned—as part of a Destination Imagination challenge. The students won second place at the organization’s regional competition and will compete at the state tournament in Corvallis later this spring.

Destination Imagination is an international non-profit organization that challenges students, from kindergarten to college, to think creatively to solve problems. Interested students form teams and focus on specific categories of challenges, including science and engineering problems. The Beaumont students studied different social problems experienced in their local area and concluded that the problem of pet rabbits abandoned after Easter was an issue they could help address.

Additional research brought the Beaumont Team to the Rabbit Advocates. Rabbit Advocates gave the students information on the problem of abandoned and homeless rabbits and pet rabbit care, and the students then developed a brochure and a presentation that was part of the package the students used to address their identified social problem.

The Beaumont Team is Veronica Thede, Lauren Polte, Ashley Neukamm and Elli Lewis. Jennie Thede, Veronica’s mother, is the team manager. She is the group’s facilitator, but does not give instruction or assistance, as the Destination Imagination rules require.

The team’s goal is to raise awareness for rabbits that are abandoned and mistreated. The package of information they will present in state competition includes a tri-fold brochure that suggests chocolate bunnies instead of pet rabbits as a way to celebrate the Easter holiday. It also addresses a typical lifespan of a rabbit and highlights resources for more information. Because the competition includes a performance as well, the girls wrote and acted in a skit, in which a mother decides a chocolate Easter bunny would be a better gift for her child than the baby pet bunny she sees on television.

The play closes with a delightful song, a parody on “Last Christmas I Gave you my Heart,” by the group Wham! Here are the words as rewritten by the Beaumont Team:

Last Easter I bought a bunny.
The very next day, I gave it away.
This year I’ll do something new.
I’ll get a chocolate bunny and I’ll give it to you!

Because the Beaumont Team won second place at the regional competition, it moves on to the state competition. There is also an international competition.
Fred Meyer, Inc., is donating $2.5 million per year to non-profit organizations in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. Rabbit Advocates is now listed as one of the non-profit organizations eligible to receive donations. The donations are based on customer shopping patterns. To help direct donations to Rabbit Advocates, register your Fred Meyer rewards cards and follow the prompts to direct your donation to bunnies.

This is part of the Fred Meyer community rewards program. If you have a Fred Meyer Rewards card, register it at www.fredmeyer.com/community_rewards. Search for Rabbit Advocates by name or by the assigned non-profit number, 81975. Every time you shop and use your rewards card, Rabbit Advocates earns a small donation. The program does not change your earnings for rewards points or fuel points. But it will help Rabbit Advocates. If you do not have a Fred Meyer Rewards Card, pick one up today.

### The Rabbit Advocate

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All donations made after March 17, 2014, will be gratefully acknowledged in the next issue of The Rabbit Advocate. All donations are tax deductible.
Follow the trail of leads to good health
Taking care of a rabbit requires detective work

They can’t tell you when they don’t feel well. In fact, they don’t even want you to know when they are sick. So in order to figure out whether or not your bunny needs medical attention, pet caretakers have to be observant and resourceful. It’s a matter of playing detective and following the trail of leads of a rabbit’s behavior.

The following descriptions of behaviors may be clues that will help you figure out what your bunny may (or may not) be trying to tell you. These descriptions are based on observations, they are not symptoms as enumerated in medical journals. They can be the basis for the start of a conversation with your veterinarian.

The behavior
“Discomfort” is the word brought to mind by this bunny that can’t seem to find a comfortable place. He will sit up, lay down, stretch out, and then repeat the poses all over again. This is very different from a bunny that sits in the “meatloaf” position that usually means resting.

What it may mean
A rabbit that moves as if going through the poses in a yoga class may have gas bubbles in his tummy or intestines. Rabbits have no way to pass these gas bubbles. They are not able to burp or be flatulent. So gas can build up in their digestive systems and make them very uncomfortable. The bunny that sits and stretches repeatedly is likely trying to break up those gas bubbles that are causing discomfort.

What to do
Call your veterinarian for guidance right away. A bunny that is uncomfortable can soon become one that doesn’t move much at all. The medical problem can go from discomfort from gas to ileus, which is a slowing of the digestive system. Ileus becomes a true medical emergency. Catching the discomfort before it can progress to ileus can be the difference between an issue that needs medical attention and a medical emergency.

The behavior
Obsessively licking or even hanging on his pen by his teeth

What it may mean
The bunny may be suffering tooth pain. The tooth pain may be the result of an overgrown molar tooth, digging into the gum or side of the mouth. Or it may be an abscessed tooth. Licking the metal of a cage or pen is likely not from boredom. It is more likely a budding medical problem. A rabbit that sits with its mouth open on the pen, as if it were hanging from the bars, is trying to alleviate pain by creating space at the back of the jaw.

What to do
Medical attention is required. The veterinarian may need to do both a physical exam and an x-ray to determine the origin of the pain. Pain medication may be required, and follow up action of molar trimming, especially in older rabbits, or antibiotics for an abscess, may be prescribed.

The behavior
A very hungry bunny may rush toward the food bowl at meal time but may then decline to eat.

What it may mean
This may also be a rabbit suffering tooth pain. The rabbit is very hungry, and may even be starving, but because of a tooth problem, simply can’t eat.

What to do
Medical attention is required. The veterinarian should check for molar spurs and may need to do x-rays in addition to the physical exam to determine
the origin of the problem. Rabbits’ digestive systems require that they eat often, with tremendous amounts of fiber in their diet. A rabbit that is unable to eat may soon suffer secondary symptoms of a slowed digestive system. This could compound the problem of tooth pain to create a potentially lethal situation.

**The behavior**
Sudden change in litter box habits, including becoming incontinent

**What it may mean**
The rabbit may not like the litter in the box, or may object to a change in the rest of the household. The rabbit may have grown older and arthritis may prevent her from comfortably jumping into and out of the litter box. But before the caretaker assumes one of these reasons, it is important to rule out a medical issue.

The sudden incontinence or refusal to use a litter box could stem from several different medical problems. Likely a blood test should be performed to rule out a kidney or bladder infection. Changes in litter box habits or incontinence can also be an indication of an E. Cuniculi infection. This is particularly true if the incontinence is combined with a rabbit that seems to be drinking or urinating more. E cuniculi is actually a parasite that rests in the rabbit’s brain. In most cases, the parasite is passed from mother to baby rabbit in utero and the rabbit lives with the inactive parasite its whole life. Often, rabbits can harbor the parasite and demonstrate no ill effects. But sometimes symptoms will suddenly appear, particularly as the rabbit ages. A rabbit that develops cataracts, especially at an early age, may be suffering from E. cuniculi. It is important to treat E. Cuniculi symptoms because the condition will get progressively worse. A cure is not possible but arresting the symptoms is possible with a specific anti-parasitic medication.

**What to do**
Rule out a medical problem by taking the rabbit for an exam. The rabbit could harbor an infection even if there is no fever. Often straining to urinate is a sign of a bladder infection. But a kidney infection may produce no additional behavior as a symptom. A veterinarian may prescribe antibiotics for a kidney or bladder infection. Once the infection is eradicated, litter box habits may revert to normal usage.

**The behavior**
Failure to properly groom their own faces, leaving a wet chin or even drooling

**What it may mean**
Rabbits are fastidious creatures and groom themselves top to bottom multiple times each day. One of the most charming activities they complete is to wash their faces, using their front paws to clean. A rabbit that drools or has a wet chin is not feeling well. Drooling may indicate that they can’t properly or comfortably close their mouths, so saliva simply falls out. A wet chin can mean that grooming is painful.

**What to do**
The rabbit should be immediately checked for a tooth problem, perhaps misaligned front teeth or a spur on their molars.

**The behavior**
A rabbit that shakes his head, scratches at his ears or suddenly sits with his head tilted to one side

**What it may mean**
The E. Cuniculi parasite can cause sudden head tilt or even loss of balance. This is very frightening for the caretaker and medical attention should be sought immediately. A rabbit that shakes his head, scratches at his ears or tilts his head may be suffering from an ear infection.

**What to do**
A veterinary exam will be able to determine whether or not the ear is infected. Antibiotics are the most likely treatment for an ear infection.

**The behavior**
Scratching excessively

**What it may mean**
All animals, just like all people, scratch to relieve transitory itches. But if the scratching becomes more persistent or is concentrated on one spot of the body, the rabbit should be checked for fleas. If the scratching is accompanied by white flakes at the hairline that look like dandruff, the problem could be flea mites.

**What to do**
Both fleas and flea mites are treatable problems. Veterinary attention will offer the proper medication.

This list is not exhaustive but is intended to be a helpful guide in determining the reason behind sometimes mysterious behaviors. Contributors included Kori Quatermass, Guin Boostrom and Dr. Katrina Ramsell.

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**Thank You to Our Vets!**

We gratefully acknowledge the generosity of the following veterinarians and staffs for their services to our rescued rabbits:

- Dr. Katrina Ramsell
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- Dr. Nell Ostermeier
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- Dr. Mary Blankenvoort and Dr. Peter Davis
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- Dr. Rebecca Prull
  NW Neighborhood Vet Hospital, Portland
- Dr. Ken DeReamer
  Paws and Claws Pet Medical Center, Troutdale and Peninsula Dog and Cat Clinic, Portland
- Dr. Matt Fricke
  McKenzie Animal Hospital, Springfield

We’d love to add more names to this list! Please call us at 503-617-1625 if you are a rabbit-savvy vet who is able to donate services to help rescued rabbits.
When convincing people that rabbits make great indoor pets who can be given free run of a room or even the entire house, one question is about litter box training. Luckily, it is usually a pretty easy process to get a rabbit to use a litter box since it builds on the rabbit’s natural behaviors.

In the wild, rabbits will always urinate in a select spot or two away from the rest of their living area. Our domestic rabbits have much the same instinct. If a rabbit has a room that is his, or an exercise pen that is his and is configured in a square or rectangular shape, he will tend to gravitate toward a corner of his space. Getting a pet rabbit to urinate in a litter box is quite often just a matter of placing a litter box in each corner of the space the rabbit has access to and observing which corner the rabbit prefers. Once your bunny figures out where her spot to urinate is, you can take away the other litter boxes.

In training your rabbit to defecate in the litter box, it is important to realize that leaving fecal pellets around their own space is a natural rabbit instinct for marking their territory. A few fecal pellets left around the edges of Bunny’s cage, exercise pen, or other space that is “her” space is normal and shouldn’t be considered a failure of litter box training. The goal with litter box training is to ensure that most of the fecal pellets end up in the litter box and that Bunny doesn’t leave fecal pellets in the rest of the spaces she has access to in the house. In order for this to happen, Bunny needs to feel that her own space is well-defined and she is safe and secure in that space. This means that you need to respect Bunny’s space. If Bunny has a cage or exercise pen that will serve as her home base, even if she will have the run of room or the whole house, you should do everything you can to help Bunny feel she has ownership of that home base space. This means that when you let Bunny out of her space, you don’t scoop her up and bring her out. Rather, you open the door of the cage or exercise pen and let her come out of her own accord. Likewise, when it’s bedtime, you don’t scoop Bunny up and put her back in her cage or pen, but rather, you herd her back to her space or lure her back with a treat and let her hop in her pen or cage of her own accord. When it’s time to fill Bunny’s food dish or clean her space, don’t go into her cage or space while she’s in it. She may feel threatened. Instead, open the door, let her go out on her own, and then go in to start cleaning or filling the food and water dishes. Bunny may come back in to see what you are doing, and this is okay. Most rabbits won’t feel threatened by your going in their space as long as you didn’t come in while they were in their space and oust them.

Once Bunny feels secure in her space and that you aren’t going to threaten her ownership of the space, litter box training can begin in earnest. If Bunny’s space is a cage, you will probably already have noticed which corner of her cage she likes to go in. You’ll simply need to put a litter box in that corner. If Bunny’s space is a room or an exercise pen, you may need to start out with a box in each corner of the space until you figure out where Bunny prefers to go, and then you can take away the other boxes.

When starting out with litter training, it’s usually best to start out by limiting Bunny’s space. So, for example, if Bunny’s home base space is an exercise pen in your spare room, you might start out by keeping Bunny just in her exercise pen until she’s consistently using the litter box in her exercise pen. Then, once she’s keeping her exercise pen reasonably tidy, you might open the door to the exercise pen and let her out into the whole room. The first few times you do let her out, you should watch her closely. If she heads to a corner of the room and starts to raise her tail like she’s going to urinate, you can shout “No!” once loudly or clap your hands to get her attention and then gently herd her back to her litter box. If she then does her business in the litter box, praise her, pet her and/or give her a treat. Under no circumstances should you scoop Bunny up and plop her into the litter box or shout at her more than just one quick “No,” because she might start seeing being put in the litter box as a punishment and might form negative associations with the litter box, which is contrary to the goal of litter box training. As you expand Bunny’s space, expect that she may initially need to leave some fecal pellets at the borders of the new space she has access to. Just sweep them up and put them in the litter box. Eventually she should learn that fecal pellets are okay in her own space but the rest of the space is yours, and her fecal pellets don’t belong there.

Once Bunny is keeping the whole room tidy, you can broaden her horizons further out into other spaces in your house, following the same process. The key is to take it slowly and incrementally. You can’t go from Bunny using her litter box consistently in her cage to Bunny using her litter box consistently when she has access to the whole house all in one step. You’ll need to start out with her cage or pen, then one room, then maybe one room and a hallway, then add another room and so on, not adding more space until Bunny is consistently keeping the space she does have access to clean. If you give Bunny access to too much space all at once, it can be overwhelming for her, and she may forget her good habits. As you do let Bunny out into other rooms, to ensure litter box training success, you’ll need to make sure that she has easy access back to her space to use the litter box. If your house is large and Bunny has access to the whole space, you may need to put out a few auxiliary litter boxes so that she doesn’t need to make it all the way back to her space if she needs to go.

An important part of making the method above work is to make sure that you’ve got an enticing litter box for your bunny to use to reinforce her good habits. This means that the litter box should be the right size for your rabbit. You will have limited success if you are expecting a 2 lb dwarf rabbit to jump into a “giant” size cat litter pan. Likewise, you are asking for accidents if you expect a 15 pound Flemish Giant to squeeze into a tiny kitten-size litter box. Choosing the right type of litter is important, too. In choosing a litter, it is important to note that bunnies will dig in clay-based cat litters should be avoided. The
stray hay lands in the bowl. The litter box should be near the rest of the rabbit home, but not too close to the water bowl so that a good, bunny-safe litter, you’ll also want to put Once you’ve got the right size litter pan filled with you need to change the litter box more frequently. but as hay is not very absorbent, you may find that or cedar do. You can also simply use hay as a litter, which do not contain the same aromatic oils that pellets (such as wood stove pellets or Dry Den), which do not contain the same aromatic oils that release gasses that damage rabbit livers. Natural litters made out of corn cobs or wheat or oat hulls should also be avoided simply because rabbits may find them tasty enough to eat, and high carbohydrate products such as these can lead to obesity and gastrointestinal distress. The best litters to use with rabbits are either paper-based (such as CareFresh or Yesterday’s News) or saw dust pellets (such as wood stove pellets or Dry Den), which do not contain the same aromatic oils that release toxic gasses that soft wood shavings like pine or cedar do. You can also simply use hay as a litter, but as hay is not very absorbent, you may find that you need to change the litter box more frequently.

Once you’ve got the right size litter pan filled with a good, bunny-safe litter, you’ll also want to put a handful of hay in one end of the litter box. This will encourage your rabbit to jump in the box, have a munch and stick around to do her business. This may seem utterly weird to humans that bunnies would eat in the same place that they go to the bathroom, but for bunnies this is perfectly normal and is a good way to ensure that the litter box gets used. Bunnies will usually urinate in the opposite end of the litter box from where you place the hay, but after a day or two, they may also spread the hay out. As such, you will want to keep an eye out that the hay doesn’t get soaked with urine. If it does, you may want to change the litter box or at least put dry fresh litter and hay on top of the soaked hay.

Troubleshooting:

1) I’ve put litter boxes down all over my house, but my rabbit still pees and/or poops everywhere. What am I doing wrong?

Is your rabbit under a year old? Is s/he spayed or neutered? Young rabbits, especially those that are not fixed, can be very territorial and will use urine and fecal pellets to mark things as “property of Bunny.” For this reason, most shelters and rescues will not adopt out adolescent rabbits until they have been altered, as most pet parents will find this behavior very frustrating to deal with. If you do find yourself adopting or fostering a young rabbit that has not been altered, you will need to have patience and accept that despite your best efforts, there will be accidents. After the bunny gets a bit older and is spayed or neutered, the litter box habits should get better. (It’s important to note that rabbits will not immediately adopt impeccable litter box habits the moment you bring them home from spay/neuter surgery. It can take a few weeks for hormones to dissipate and good habits to take effect. Be patient. It should happen within a month or so of surgery.)

If you have an older rabbit who is going to the bathroom everywhere, particularly if the rabbit has already been spayed or neutered, and especially if the rabbit has previously had good litter box habits, a trip to the vet may be in order to ensure there is no medical issue causing incontinence. Once you have ruled out health-related causes for your bunny’s worsening litter box habits, you will want to look at whether there have been any changes in the rabbit’s environment. Have you moved into a new house? Do you have a new roommate or significant other living with you? Have you brought home a new pet or a new baby? Have you rearranged the furniture in your house? Have you started a new job that has completely changed your schedule? If there is a major upset in the rabbit’s routine or space such that he feels his territory is threatened, he might revert to behaviors like urinating or defecating outside the litter box. In these instances, you’ll want to give your bunny lots of reassurance and maybe limit his free-roaming space until he gets a little more settled with the new routine and begins using his litter box consistently again.

2) My rabbit often pees right next to the litter box rather than in it. What’s up with that?

What is often happening in these instances is that the bunny is going in the litter box, but her little bunny buns are hanging over the side of the box. The fix for this is to get a taller, high-back style of litter box.

In my personal experience, I have also had rabbits exhibit this peeing-right-next-to-the-litter-box behavior if I have been busy and haven’t emptied the litter box as often as I usually do. This can be Bunny’s way of saying “this box is gross and needs to be cleaned.” In which case, empty the box, give it a wash, put in fresh litter, and your problem should be solved.
Upcoming Meetings & Events 2014

**General Meetings**

3rd Sunday of the month
(Please note: April’s meeting is on the 2nd Sunday)
3:30 pm – 5:30 pm

Location: Courtyard Manor Assisted Living, 6125 SE Division St., Portland

Meetings begin with a “Bunny Basics” Q & A session where we invite your questions about any aspect of rabbit care. The public is welcome!

2014 Dates

| April 13 | July 20 | Oct 19 |
| May 18  | Aug 17  | Nov 16 |
| June 15 | Sept 6  | Dec 21 |

**Bunny’s Best Bites**

**Hay Packing Parties**

Volunteers blend and bag different types of hay to create Bunny’s Best Bites, our own custom blend of hay. For more information about the hay parties, see the Rabbit Advocate website at [www.rabbitadvocates.org](http://www.rabbitadvocates.org)

First Saturday of the month, 10 am – 2 pm

2014 Dates

| April 5 | July 5 | Oct 4 |
| May 3   | Aug 2  | Nov 1 |
| June 7  | Sept 6 | Dec 6 |

Find us on Facebook: Rabbit Advocates

**Education & Adoption Outreaches**

Rabbit Advocates sponsors educational events featuring adoptable foster rabbits along with tips on rabbit handling, diet, housing, health and general care. Experienced volunteers provide grooming and nail trimming services for rabbits (suggested donations of $5 for nail trims and $5 for light grooming are appreciated). Outreaches are held the second Sunday of each month from noon-3 pm at the Tigard Petco at 11705 SW Pacific Highway, Tigard, Oregon. For more information, see the Rabbit Advocate website at [www.rabbitadvocates.org](http://www.rabbitadvocates.org)

2014 Dates

| April 13 | July 13 | Oct 12 |
| May 11   | Aug 10  | Nov 9  |
| June 8   | Sept 14 | Dec 14 |

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