

Rescuing rabbits for 30 years!



By Jessica Sullivan

We recently caught up with Jennifer Lee, San Diego House Rabbit Society (SDHRS) Executive Director and Julia Rivera-Knoblock, SDHRS Program Assistant, to talk to them about how SDHRS helps rabbits. It quickly became clear that SDHRS' comprehensive mission supports pet rabbits and their pawrents in many ways, rivalling the number of bunnies produced daily!

While Jennifer learns something about SDHRS' history every time she speaks with her predecessors, the non-profit rabbit welfare organisation has been rescuing abandoned domestic rabbits in San Diego and southwest Riverside County, California, United States, for 30 years. Additionally, the rescue helps



Demogorgon waiting for his forever home

buns find new homes, supports the local shelters in caring for their rabbits and educates the community on the proper and responsible care of domestic rabbit companions.

Jennifer also shared that when she spoke with her predecessors and mentors in the house rabbit

community, she learned the paths that lead to running a rescue are as varied as the number of rabbit breeds. However, she is very grateful for all the people and rescues that helped her find her way to help rabbits. Jennifer adopted her first rabbit from Oakland (California) Animal Services after completing a bunny sitting stint for a friend. The bunny sitting/care instructions Jennifer received from her friend seemed off, so Jennifer searched online and stumbled across the House Rabbit Society website.

Fast-forward to today, Jennifer says her job is to make sure the organization is



Alissa Munson (left) and Isabelle Tancioni (above) helping at the RHDV2 Vaccine Clinic

running smoothly, while she has a wonderful staff to keep the facility running smoothly. She provides holistic support for 11 paid staff and an average of 50 volunteers. Jennifer is so grateful for her strong and intelligent team, who she trusts implicitly. Her team includes up to 20 foster homes, and she is extra thankful for all the volunteers and staff who are the backbone of the rescue.

Jennifer recalled several significant events in SDHRS' history, including moving to their current location in 2014, the first rabbit-only shelter in San Diego. All rabbit records were entirely digitized in 2017-2018. In 2020, the Board decided on a pivotal strategy to keep the rescue moving ahead. The plan included bringing more robust systems and structures, such as software, to run their boarding facility, bringing in much-needed revenue. Additionally, Jennifer shared that the boarding program is critical to keeping adopted rabbits in their homes. She explained when people adopt, they tend to rehome their rabbits if they don't have a place to go when their humans travel. SDHRS' boarding facility provides an affordable care option for rabbit pawrents. Finally, in support of the new strategy, the entire staff worked as a team to

improve their overall mission and Educator Program.

SDHRS considers all rabbits "adoptable"; however, if anybun needs extra TLC such as medical care or socialisation, they're cared for off-site in loving foster homes. When they have additional boarding guests during the holidays, all 20 foster homes are activated to make more room.

Jennifer's refreshing leadership style includes the mantras, "if a rabbit is not hurt, I leave it up to my team" and "we don't do it for the numbers; we do it for the rabbits' quality of life." She said they make the adoption program as robust as possible, as it obviously facilitates more intakes. Her team is constantly evaluating the best number of rabbits at the rescue versus the number of paid staff and volunteers.

While the rabbits reside at SDHRS, they get the best of everything. All "single" residents have at least a 4-foot x 4-foot exercise pen, and bonded pairs and groups get at least a 4x6 or 4x8 size enclosure. All setups are carefully annotated, so if they move locations in the facility or to a foster home, everything always looks the same. Also,



ensuring top-notch health care rehabilitates new intakes and sets the bunnies up for success in their forever homes. In addition, exotic veterinarians come in to check on the residents every two weeks. SDHRS has an extensive list of 20 veterinary community partners and two emergency clinics for those requiring advanced care. Finally, when buns are adopted, the pawrents are given their medical records and lists with those community partners, many of which offer free or discounted initial wellness exams and 10% - 15% treatment discounts for being SDHRS alumni. SDHRS members have access discounts at certain vet clinics.

We appreciate Jennifer and Julia taking the time to speak to us. Still, we couldn't end the interview without hearing about their pampered pet bunnies. Julia is a proud bunmom to 14 loveable lagomorphs. Jennifer has a bonded pair, Becka and Ash.

Follow SDHRS on Facebook and Instagram: @sandiegorabbits Or visit their website: sandiegorabbits.org



Jennifer's bunnies Becka and Ash



Board President, Karen Gurneck (pictured left), and Executive Director, Jennifer Lee (right)

Above: Save the date! Bunfest Sunday September 24th.

