**Critter Corner**

**Tips for Adding a New Animal to Your Family**

**There is a GREAT opportunity coming soon to meet some amazing rescue animals that are available for adoption! On Sunday, October 9th, the annual “Bow-Wows & Meows” will be at Hart Park from 11 a.m. until 4 p.m. All of the Los Angeles County shelters bring animals and it is the largest adoption day for the County shelters. In addition, there are many animal-related vendors and low-cost microchipping and vaccines. It is a free event and we want to invite everyone to come join us for a day of animal fun! It very well might be the day you meet the new furry love of your life.**

**See these photos of some of our Hart Family with their own furry friends!**

**Here are some thoughts to consider, when you are thinking of bringing a new animal into your family. Baby animals are cute and steal hearts very quickly, however, please consider the following before taking one into your life: 1) research the size and temperament of the adult animal; and 2) be realistic about whether or not you can commit to taking care of the animal for the long haul.**

**This means that a baby Burmese python may be adorable and easily handled at one foot long but when it grows to twenty feet or more and weighs two-hundred pounds as an adult female, you may have a problem. Pets are frequently displaced because their person can no longer safely handle them, house them or afford them. Florida’s Everglades is overrun with large pet snakes that are dumped there, as a result of their people not wanting them anymore. Then, those snakes – which are not indigenous to the area – wreak havoc on the local ecosystem. Ultimately, it leads to snake hunts, where hundreds of snakes are brutally killed, in an effort to correct the ecosystem’s balance. Everyone loses, especially the animals. In addition, an animal can be docile as a baby or juvenile but then become aggressive as they reach sexual maturity. A black-throated monitor lizard might seem like a good idea as a baby but then can be quite intimidating as a full-grown adult lizard. It is very important to respect your animals and their capabilities but you do not want to fear them. I have met people that were afraid of their animals—whether it was a horse, dog, snake, lizard or spider. Fear is very undesirable in any relationship, especially with your animal. It prevents you from a truly fulfilling and nurturing relationship. All of my personal animals are rescues, and some of them came to me as a result of their person being afraid of them. Learn about your potential animal before bringing it into your home, to see if it really is a good fit or not.**

**The second point is to be realistic about a lifetime commitment. It is one thing to get an animal for your child that lives to be ten or fifteen years old but an entirely other thing to get one that lives to be over one-hundred years old! For example, some tortoises and parrots can live as long as one-hundred and fifty years old. What might seem like a good idea when someone is ten years old turns out, instead, to be a passing fancy. A couple of my rescues are from parents that became tired of taking care of their children’s animals. The animals were adopted when the children were small... but by college they were completely forgotten. Additionally, some animals, like parrots, bond with one person. When that person can no longer care for the bird for whatever reason, replacement people can have a really hard time bonding with the bird.**

**We have a pet overpopulation problem in this country. By that, I mean: every year, millions of healthy, adoptable animals are euthanized. There is simply not enough space in the shelters to keep everyone indefinitely. So, please spay and neuter your animals that co-mingle, especially all cats and dogs. In addition, rescued pets really do make the best pets. When looking for the most suitable animal for your home, check out your local shelters. If you are patient and diligent, even purebred animals become available for adoption. When I do school tours, I tell the children about the five essential requirements that all animals need. They are: 1) water; 2) food; 3) shelter; 4) vet care; and 5) L-O-V-E! Animals are responsibilities. They require constant care and attention. One of the purest loves we can experience, though, is between us and our animal friends. They add so much to our lives and ask for very little in return. The very least that we can do is to be realistic and set up the new animal to be a successful addition to our lives. Remember these tips for success:**

* **Research the animal**
* **Lifetime commitment**
* **Adopt from local shelters and rescues**
* **Provide the 5 essentials to all animals in your care (water, food, shelter, vet care, and love)**

**Life is better when shared with animals! May you have long, happy, and healthy relationships with all of the critters that grace your life’s path!**