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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LEAP Members Volunteer at the Aiken County Animal Shelter

AIKEN, S.C. (Feb. 12, 2018) – Fifteen members of Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS) LEAP (Leaders Emerging Among Professionals) recently spent their Saturday morning with adoptable cats and dogs at the Aiken County Animal Shelter.

During LEAP's first outreach event of the year, the volunteers were shown around by Ellie Joos, FOTAS (Friends of the Animal Shelter) board member and on-site events coordinator, who gave them an overview about the year-round volunteer opportunities and the FOTAS programs that help the animals find forever homes.

"Last year, we reached our goal of saving over 4,000 animals," said Joos. "We're very proud of how far we've come. Ten years ago 90 percent of the animals were euthanized, but now we're down to 18 percent. When we get under 10 percent, we'll be considered a 'no kill' shelter."

The shelter strives to save every adoptable animal, but there simply aren't enough people in the surrounding communities to take all the animals home. To alleviate this problem of supply and demand, FOTAS relies on weekly transfers where the animals are driven to areas of the country that have stricter spay and neuter ordinances.



Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS) Leaders Emerging Among Professionals (LEAP) recently volunteered at the Aiken County Animal Shelter, where they planted flowers, cleared walking trails and played with cats and dogs. First row, from left: Kelsey Schlegel, Cody Fee and Hope Hartman. Second row, from left: Jessica Pedraza, Favio Intriago, Kim Johnson, Taylor Gomillion, Aaron Rieske, Kris Napolitano, Alexis Musick, Timothy Nehring, Ethan Reisker, Liz Vos, Brad Baker and Caroline Reppert.

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“These areas we target don’t have an overpopulation of animals, so there are less adoptable pets to choose from,” Joos added. “By moving the transferred animals out of the adoption floor, we’re able to bring in animals from the intake side over to the adoption side of the facility. It’s a very fluid situation with animals moving over all the time. I’ll be here in the morning, and by the afternoon, we’ll have ten new dogs available on the adoption floor.”

After the introduction to the animal shelter, LEAP members spent the rest of the morning getting the shelter grounds ready for spring by planting flowers, clearing the walking trails, washing windows, cleaning out kennels and rinsing pet crates.

The group also played with the dogs in a fenced-in area and with the cats in the cat house, which is equipped with an enclosed outdoor patio, or “catio.”

LEAP member Brad Baker of SRNS Operational Readiness not only volunteered with his wife and daughters during the outreach event, but he also added a new four-legged member to the family. The Baker family brought home “Cooper,” a one-year-old mix-breed dog.

“Cooper loves affection and wanted to stay next to me the whole car ride home,” said Baker. “He has a great temperament, gets along well with our cats, and seems to be house trained already. We’re obedience training him now, and he’s learning quickly. He has already mastered several commands that he was initially unresponsive to. We had been looking for the right dog for a little while and happened to see Cooper on his morning walk while we were working. That was the first day he was ready for adoption, and we knew he would be adopted quickly so we discussed it and decided to take him home before someone else did. It couldn’t have worked out any better.”

Founded in 2009, the Friends of the Animal Shelter - Aiken County is a nonprofit volunteer organization to supplement the resources of the Aiken County Animal Shelter. The organization’s mission is to support the Aiken County Animal Shelter by promoting animal welfare and responsible pet ownership so that one day, no adoptable animal will ever need to be euthanized in the shelter.

In 2017, South Carolina’s Secretary of State Mark Hammond recognized FOTAS as an “Angel” among charitable organizations throughout the state. Only 10 out of 13,000 charities were given the award, and they were recognized for allocating 80 percent or more of their funds directly to their programs while receiving minimal funding from grants.

FOTAS was also able to recently achieve over \$200,000 in donations to build a brand-new “isolation wellness center” for animals recovering from surgeries or illnesses. On Feb. 9, FOTAS hosted a public ribbon cutting to commemorate the new facility.

“Volunteers are very much in demand here,” Joos said. “Last year alone, we logged over 55,000 volunteer hours. We depend on funds from the county which are divided among many different organizations. We have a list of over 300 volunteers, but we need groups like LEAP to come in and do big projects for us – some of the things we’d love to have done, but we just don’t have the resources. This workday helped us get ready for our much-anticipated ribbon cutting of our new wellness center.”

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LEAP is a peer-led organization whose members are full-time employees at Savannah River Nuclear Solutions and have earned, at a minimum, an associate's degree within the past seven years. In addition to providing networking and professional development opportunities, LEAP organizes community outreach events for its members through organizations such as the Special Olympics, Ronald McDonald House, Aiken Equine Rescue and Golden Harvest Food Bank.

Savannah River Nuclear Solutions is a Fluor-led company whose members are Fluor Federal Services, Newport News Nuclear and Honeywell, responsible for the management and operations of the Department of Energy's Savannah River Site, including the Savannah River National Laboratory, located near Aiken, South Carolina.

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