

What's under the tree for your fuzzy friends?

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OPERATION KINDNESS

The no-kill shelter is at 3201 Earhart Drive in Carrollton. For more information about the pets in this feature or others, call 972-418-7297 or visit the Web site at www.operationkindness.org.

For those not interested in adoption, the shelter can always use donations, both monetary and in-kind, says executive director Jonnie England. A wish list is posted on its Web site. Volunteers are also needed, as well as people willing to provide foster care.

"The foster homes truly are saving lives ... we just don't have enough of those folks," Ms. England says.

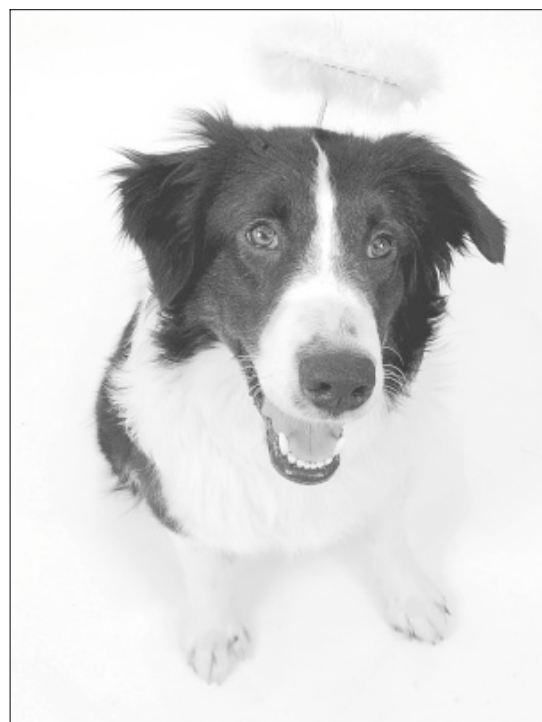
Jennifer Chamberlain

On DallasNews.com

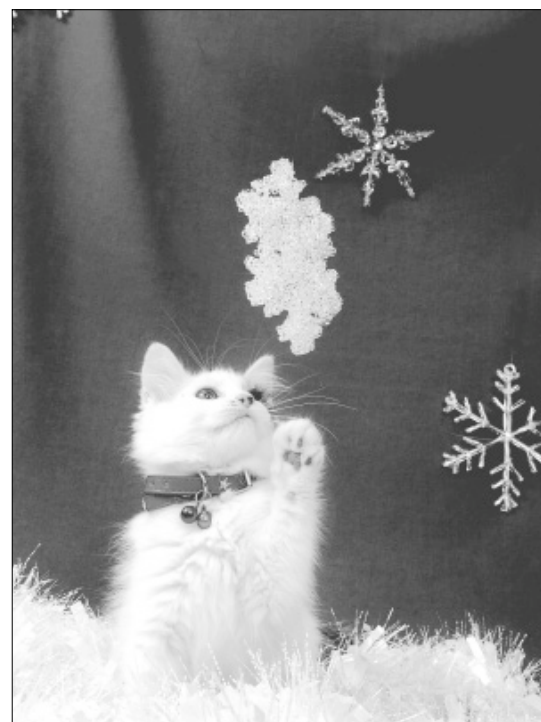
Send these and other adorable pets as an e-card from DallasNews.com/cardstock.



Savannah, a 3-month-old golden retriever, gets the spa treatment with aromatherapy products from Spa Dog (www.spadogbotanicals.com, \$68). And to make bath time a little easier on both of you, the Pet Jet (www.M2pets.com, \$34.95) lets you shampoo and rinse with the click of a button. Savannah has been adopted.



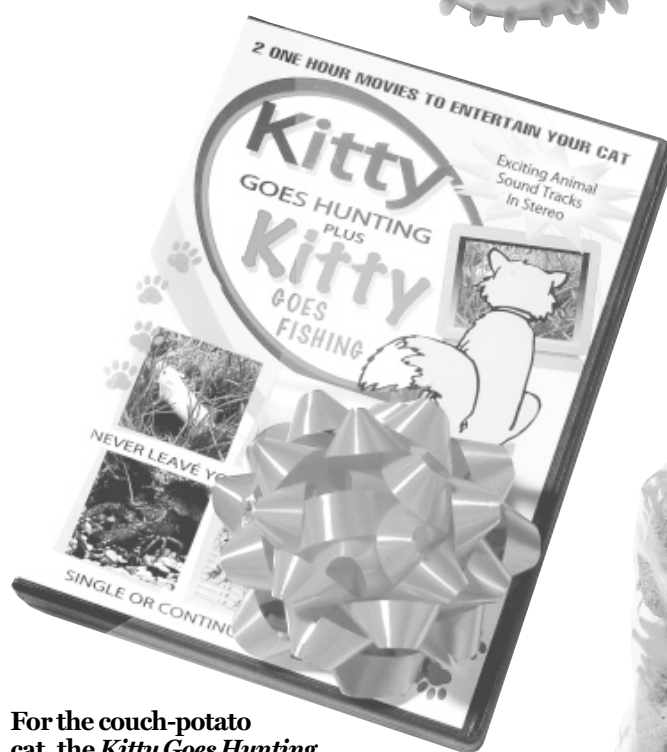
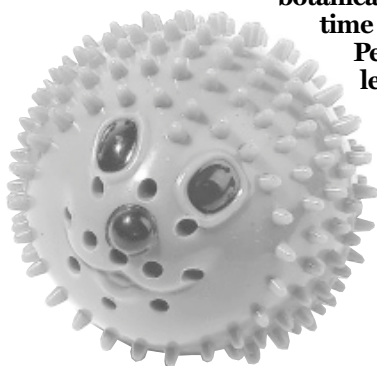
Is your pet a perfect angel? Let the world know with a halo (99 Cents Only, 99 cents). Darla, an 8-month-old female border collie, has been adopted.



For the pet with fashion sense, how about a new collar (Target, \$1)? Cecelia, a 3-month-old blue and white medium-hair kitten, has been at Operation Kindness since Oct. 25.



Not your average ball, Pet Qwerks' Babble Ball (Petco, \$11.99) talks and interacts with your pet.



For the couch-potato cat, the *Kitty Goes Hunting* DVD (www.petqwerks.com, \$11.99) offers hours of entertainment with scenes of mice, darting fish and other feline favorites.



Christmas-tree-shaped dog treats (Petco, \$3.99 per pound) make a festive feast.



Cleaning up after your dog on walks is a snap with the Bon Ton Doggy Pick-Up Kit (Container Store, \$6.99). The bone-shaped container comes with 10 plastic waste bags and can clip on to a leash or belt.



Pet Qwerks' Rainbow Ball (Petco, \$11.99) lights up and changes colors, and it can double as a night light.



Let your pet dine in style with Urban Paws dog bowl, mat and treat canister set (Sam's, \$9.81)

Photos by NATALIE CAUDILL/Staff Photographer
Styling by KAREN ELIZABETH WATTS/Special Contributor

YOUR CLEANING SOLUTIONS

We recently asked readers to tell us how they inspire their families to pitch in on the house-cleaning. Here are some of their solutions.

Leslie Garcia

Cross it off the list

When her daughters were young, Debbie Gallagher of Cedar Hill made a list of everything that needed to be done. Then everyone would take turns choosing a chore. She remembers when her youngest daughter, Suzanne, was 7 and would yell out, "I get to clean the toilets!"

"We'd turn up the radio and would work until everything on the list was done," says Ms. Gallagher, 55. "We'd do this at the beginning of the weekend or the first day of spring break."

Then they'd plan something fun to do, going to the zoo, for example. That would be on the list, too.

"You just have to not be too picky about everything being perfect," she says. "We loved being able to cross things off the list and then enjoy our clean house."

It's everybody's mess

On Saturdays, Jan McCleskey, her husband and four kids have what they call "ALL clean time." The Rowlett family goes from room to room together,

cleaning as they go.

"We started this because we had too many kids saying, 'I didn't make that mess,' or 'I am only cleaning up MY mess!'" says Mrs. McCleskey, 43.

She also has instituted "hassle-time chores." She fills a jar with chores written on slips of paper, green for the three oldest, orange for the youngest. When a child steps out of line — fights with a sibling or argues with a parent, maybe, or eats outside the kitchen — he or she picks a chore from the hassle-time jar.

Check, please!

Each Sunday at the home of Lori and Mike Doran, the chore tally begins. By Friday, each of their three sons has to earn seven checkmarks for chores done — voluntarily, no less — or there's no outside activities.

"I use an index card to keep track, and it's the boys' responsibility to make sure they get credit," says Mrs. Doran, 45, who lives in Flower Mound.

Chores include setting the table, clearing the table, loading and unloading the dishwasher, vacuuming, taking out the garbage or cleaning out the car.

Also, the boys may keep their rooms any way they'd like during the week, but they must be cleaned before any weekend activity starts. And that's a must; therefore, no checkmarks.

The laundry list

Heidi Vose of Mansfield doesn't like doing laundry, and with four kids she had loads ... and loads.

"As your kids get older, you can never get it right," she says. "So when I got my fill of complaints ... each child was shown and walked through the laundry process, which included spot removal."

She also assigned each child a laundry day.

If they miss it, they're out of luck — and clean clothes — for the week.

"Now they do their own laundry, and if it is messed up or they have nothing to wear, it is not my fault," she says. "And mom is much happier."

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In first novel in 14 years, Cooper visits Dream Street

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"I didn't know who would tell me the story. I was sick, staring at the ceiling for two years. Then I saw these characters through a yellow haze. You knew these houses had stories. This child shows up and could do everything but tell the future."

The story begins in 1895 in the Deep South, then goes to Oklahoma and on to the early '60s in the Midwest. It ultimately chronicles the intertwined lives of the Dream Street neighbors.

Children are good story starters, and generational tales are good mechanisms because in them "somebody every age is going to find something they need to know," she points out.

Ms. Cooper is eager to get going again. She also has written *Wild Stars Seeking Midnight Sun*, a collection of short stories that will publish soon. For now, though, focus is on the novel.

"It's important that this book sells because I've been gone so long. The next contract is coming up, and also, I love this book. I love these people, their wisdom, their struggles."

Recently someone compared her to Harlem Renaissance writer-folklorist Zora Neale Hurston.

"It was irksome, and it told me this person doesn't read. Sure, it's a compliment to be described as the 'new Zora Neale Hurston,' but it's not quite accurate," she says.

"Some of my favorite writers are Taylor Caldwell, Pearl Buck,



"I write for everybody. It's not fair the way writers are pigeonholed. It would be nice if people thought of me as a writer."

J. California Cooper

John Steinbeck. In England, they've compared me to Tolstoy. I know I'm nowhere near Tolstoy."

But, she explains that when she is compared to Tolstoy, it is an inspiration to reach for higher ground.

Loving books

Ms. Cooper grew up with a college-educated mother who loved books, and she was an early reader. Her books are not for a black audience only, she says.

"I write for everybody. It's not fair the way writers are pigeonholed. It would be nice if people thought of me as a writer."

Her pharmacist in California, who is white, read *Some People* and told her she loved it because she had been mothered by it.

"When I went to bed that night, I hugged my book and said, 'I mothered her.' Been wondering all this time what people got out of my books. What my books try to do is tell people about life, like your mother does."

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