

Alex Galindo and Kai,
his 9-month-old
Siberian husky puppy.



Bloomington

A PET-FRIENDLY PLACE

The city offers plenty of amenities for pets and their people, making it a doggone great place to be an animal companion.

By Susan M. Brackney • Photography by Naama Levy

Bloomington is a city that makes it easy to have—and to be—a companion animal. Here you'll find 30-plus miles of walking trails peppered with 30 dog-waste bag stations, two dog parks, reduced-cost veterinary services, and the widespread availability of pet-friendly rental housing, among other creature comforts.

A lot of assistance comes from organizations like the Monroe County Humane Association (MCHA). Its website lists information on everything from local pet ordinances to the many services offered by the nonprofit, including low-cost vaccines and spay-neuter assistance. Another major player is City of Bloomington Animal Care and Control, which recently completed a \$2.1 million renovation and expansion project. Approximately 4,000 animals pass through the shelter each year. Most of them find their forever homes.

"Last year, 84 percent of the dogs coming into the shelter were adopted, and we were up to 76 percent for cats," says Director Virgil Sauder. And, Sauder says, the majority of animals that *were* euthanized—just 6 percent of dogs and 10 percent of cats—had serious injuries or aggression issues. (The difference between adoption and euthanasia rates represents animals transported elsewhere for potential adoption.)

The shelter expansion also makes longer stays more practical. "We have a fair number of animals that just stay in the

shelter until they're adopted," Sauder says. That's possible because of improvements like a new ventilation system that carries fresh air from the healthiest animals first to the sickest animals last, reducing the risk of air-borne disease transmission; roomier, individually ventilated cat kennels; and reconfigured dog runs. All of this means shelter staff can now more effectively manage animal health.

"If an animal is sick, they're going to sit here longer, because they don't get out the door," Sauder says. So healthier animals mean faster adoptions.

CITIZEN CANINE

Beyond low-cost veterinary care and spay-neuter services, Bloomington offers companion animal caregivers plenty of other kinds of support. Animal behaviorists and training experts help dogs and their people live happier, healthier lives. Whether it's a basic obedience class or something more advanced, any class where a dog learns expected behaviors is a valuable experience.

Emily Herr is the outreach coordinator and behavior consultant for Bloomington Animal Care and Control. "Dogs thrive when they have routine, exercise, mental stimulation, and social interactions," Herr says. "All of these can be achieved through training. Daily tasks, such as going for walks, having guests over, or going to the

veterinarian, are a breeze when your dog has a well-established training lifestyle."

Of course, training can mean simply teaching your dog to sit quietly. Or it can mean learning to tear through an obstacle course—leaping over hurdles and bellying through tubes. "Any kind of training you do with your dog improves your connection," says Flying Paws Agility Club President Jana Wilson. "When you do agility training, you create this culture of working together with your dog."

Some Flying Paws Agility members regularly compete in organized agility trials. Others just enjoy the challenge and the positive changes they see in their dogs. "I've seen the shyest, most frightened little dogs go through agility, and their confidence just blossoms, because they learn that they can do this stuff," Wilson says.

LEGAL BEAGLES

Ensuring companion animals are properly trained and socialized—and respecting the City's animal-related ordinances—can only further Bloomington's reputation as a pet paradise. "We kind of walk that line between the strong animal-lovers and those who don't necessarily like animals," Sauder says. "We have both in this town, and everybody should be able to enjoy life here."

That means adhering to Bloomington's leash law. "Just because your dog is well-behaved doesn't mean that person walking



(above left, l-r) Eric Nash and Hannah Spiegel, with Simon, their companion, a Boston terrier mix. “He’s our first child together. We love having him in our lives.”

(above right) Michael Anderson with Manji, an American pitbull terrier. “Manji is like a child to me. She is my best friend and she makes me happy.”

toward you wants anything to do with it,” Sauder says. “It’s that mutual respect that we have to have for people who don’t have pets and those who do.”

Bloomington’s animal-related ordinances may help preserve the peace; meanwhile, Indiana House Bill 1085 just might disrupt it—albeit for good reason. Passed last year to help keep pooches safe, the Good Samaritan statute allows concerned citizens to forcibly enter locked vehicles containing domestic animals appearing to be in “imminent danger of suffering serious bodily harm.”

While outdoor temperatures may feel comfortable, a car’s interior temperature can quickly soar, endangering animals locked inside. Under the new law, citizens must first try contacting emergency responders before breaking in. And afterwards? They must stay with the animal until the responders arrive. Finally, although they’re on the hook for half of the repair costs, they won’t face criminal or civil charges.



BARKS AND RECREATION

For dog walkers, abiding local laws requires the diligent collection of their dog’s waste. The City’s Parks and Recreation Department makes the task easier with 30 dog waste bag stations distributed throughout city parks. A year’s supply of 140,000 “Poopy Pouch” bags costs \$3,430.

Three of those stations dot the grounds of Ferguson Dog Park, an 18.7-acre, self-policing facility. The park features separate, fenced sections for large and small breeds; dog wash stations; and picnic tables. There’s no membership fee, and the park is open to the public. “People are expected to follow the rules that their dogs are vaccinated and their dogs are not causing fights or problems,” Sauder says.

Visiting dogs must be spayed or neutered, and only two dogs are allowed per person. Dogs must be in sight and monitored at all times. “If you see your dog getting over-excited or maybe getting too rowdy, too rough, or too focused, it’s time to



(above left, l-r) Zackary Danivin and Vincent Long with adopted pet Ebi, a bichon frisé. “Ebi has a mind of his own but likes our company. It works for us.”

(above right) Scott Chevalier with Luna and Tyrion, schnauzer and schnauzhund, rescued from an animal shelter. “They are my hiking and cuddle companions.”

leave,” advises Rebecca Warren, executive director of the MCHA. “Just follow basic dog etiquette.”

Bloomington’s other dog park, at Karst Farm Park, is a members-only facility. Users pay an annual fee for access. “It’s \$50 per year, and you have to provide proof of vaccinations,” Sauder says. “Then you get a card to swipe into the dog park. That way, they know who’s there. If there are issues, they know who was there at the time, so they can follow up.”

Proof of vaccination is also required for Bloomington’s annual Drool in the Pool event. After swimming season closes for humans, canines get the last splash. “Dog guards” supervise contests and doggie paddling in the shallow parts of Mills Pool.

THE FIX IS IN—AND IT’S WORKING

While Bloomington can be a pet paradise for those animals with homes, an overrun of



unintended litters isn’t something to brag about. Efforts to reduce those numbers include a program at Animal Care and Control that began spaying or neutering every animal pre-adoption. “It used to be on a voucher system, but just having [surgeries] already done has made a difference,” Sauder says.



(above left, l-r) Dante Graham and Cortny Uttinger with Zuri, a saint berdoodle. “We couldn’t imagine our lives without Zuri. He brings joy to each and every day.”

(above right) Abby Good and Ruby, a miniature dachshund. “Definitely my partner in crime! She provides me with so much emotional support.”



As have stricter City of Bloomington ordinances. “There are higher fines for at-large dogs that are intact versus ones that are spayed and neutered,” Sauder says. “It became mandatory that, if your dog was running at-large more than once, it was a mandatory spay-neuter.”

Likewise, the nonprofit group Pets Alive has helped reduce the numbers of unintended litters in 25 Indiana counties. Established as an animal adoption program in 2002, it’s now exclusively a spay-neuter clinic. “People want to adopt away the problem, because that’s an immediate fix, but it’s not a real fix,” says Megan Reece, development and communications director for Pets Alive. “No matter how many pets we adopted out, there were still more coming. We found out the only permanent solution was spay-neuter.”

LIL BUB AND (FERAL) FRIENDS

With nearly three million followers on Facebook and another 828,000 on Twitter, Lil Bub is easily Bloomington’s most famous

formerly feral cat. The dangly-tongued perma-kitten has enjoyed coast-to-coast media exposure, allowing her to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars for homeless and special needs animals via sales of Bub-emblazoned T-shirts, calendars, and other merchandise. Still, most feral felines cannot be similarly convinced to spend life indoors.

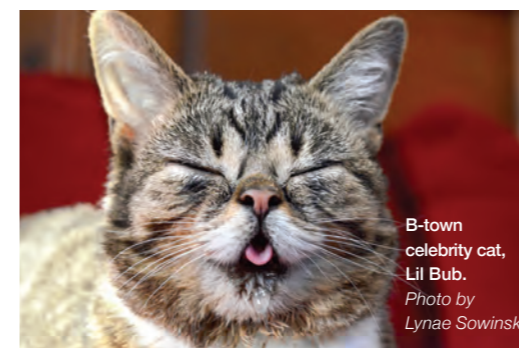
“Most feral cats have been born outdoors and they were never socialized to people,” says Erika Imhoof, communications and volunteer manager with the Brown County Humane Society (BCHS). “So it takes a long time to be able to get them acclimated. And when you already have so many cats without homes that are perfectly sociable and happy to live inside, finding an adopter for a feral cat is very difficult.”

Rather than trapping and killing these animals, officials rely on more humane “trap-neuter-return” procedures. “We still have far more unmanaged feral cat colonies in Monroe County than what we can take on,” says the MCHA’s Warren. “Proactive



(above left) Max Hanner, 12, with Peanut, a basset-pitbull mix. “Not a great listener, but we love him and he loves us.”

(above right) Alex Galindo and Kai, a Siberian husky. “He is so amazing. He gives me energy.”



B-town celebrity cat, Lil Bub. Photo by Lynae Sowinski

spay and neuter and colony management are the best tools we have to try and manage that overpopulation.” But, she admits, “It’s a long game. If we stay proactive at it, we’ll be a different community in three years and even better in five and even better off in 10.”

To that end, Pets Alive launched a new community cat program in July for residents of Monroe, Greene, and Owen counties. “If you have a cat in your neighborhood who comes to your door all the time and you’ve

been feeding it and you’re like, ‘Hey, there’s another one,’ bring it to Pets Alive,” Reece says. “Or, if it hasn’t reproduced and you aren’t sure whether or not it has been spayed, we’ll check it, and spay or neuter it for free.”

LOW-COST CARE

Caring for animals certainly isn’t cheap. According to American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals estimates, a large dog’s annual upkeep can average about \$800, while cats require about \$600. By contrast, the reduced-cost care offered by Pets Alive—including vaccinations, flea-and-tick treatments, nail trimming, and de-worming—total just over \$100 annually. While this doesn’t include food, it’s still a significant savings.

For its part, the BCHS’s Serving Pets Outreach Team (SPOT) actively helps community members in-home. “We deliver pet food assistance or straw in the winter for people who have outdoor pets,” Imhoof says. “We do anything we can to help people who



(above left, l-r) Sabrina Siew and Coley Smith with Bailey, a golden doodle. “We are both caretakers and friends to Bailey.”

(above right) Rowan Jones, 13, and Ginger, a mutt terrier mix, rescued from a shelter. “She’s very much a friend. She’s family.”



(above left, l-r) Eloise Pursell, 2, and Artemis Walden with their basset hound George, also 2. “He’s my kid. I have twins.”

(above right) Laura Wanner with chickens Delta Dawn, Olive, and Gary. “They’re better than TV and give you breakfast!”

may have financial trouble keep their pets.”

The group periodically runs surgery specials for as little as \$5 per cat or dog. And, says Imhoof, “If we see someone who has a litter of kittens or a pregnant cat or dog, we try to get them on the spay-neuter schedule, so that they’ll sign up to get those pets fixed as soon as they’re old enough.” Since SPOT’s inception, BCHS’s animal intake has dropped more than 50 percent.

Clients in need can also access the MCHA Nonprofit Veterinary Clinic. “We have a lot of different ways to try and make things happen for owners when they can’t afford their pet care,” Warren says. “We have grant funding or private funding, or we can utilize donated medication or donated equipment. We also operate a food pantry where we keep dog and cat food in stock.”

One animal-related amenity Bloomington lacks is a 24-hour emergency veterinary clinic. While it’s true that some local veterinarians offer walk-in hours or limited emergency services for established patients, there are no services available in Bloom-

ington if a pet needs to be seen at night, on the weekend, or over a holiday. “The reality is it’s really expensive to run a 24-hour emergency clinic,” Sauder says. “In order to do it, you’re usually seeing animals at their worst and you’re putting a lot of money into it, which is why they often have such high rates. They have to cover their costs.”

“Indianapolis can do it, because they have a larger population,” he adds. “That makes it a little more sustainable. But, as our population grows, it’s going to be more sustainable to have one here.”

COMPANIONS FOR ALL

When it comes to keeping our pets or having to give them up, the availability of low-cost surgeries, vaccinations, and other veterinary services can make all the difference—particularly for people experiencing homelessness. “It would be painful to lose everything in your life and then lose your beloved animal as well,” says Forrest Gilmore, executive director of Shalom Community Center. “I’ve talked

to people on both sides of that—people who have surrendered their animals and people who have kept them. In both cases, the feelings are really intense and powerful.”

Choosing to remain with a companion animal under those circumstances sometimes can mean living out of a car or living outdoors rather than staying in a shelter. “Homelessness is not fit for anyone, so trying to get everyone off the street is very important—including homeless pets,” Gilmore says.

The inclination to want to care for another being is understandable. “It’s an opportunity for people to do something positive where they’re not just being cared for *by* the animal but they are caring *for* the animal,” Gilmore says. “I think that gives them a sense of value and meaning in that they’re really responsible for something in this world.”

Even a cursory internet search will provide anecdotal examples of the health benefits of companion animals, such as countering depression and staving off heart attacks. However, recent attempts to replicate these findings through research have been largely

unsuccessful. Living with companion animals might contribute to improved quality of life or general feelings of well-being, but it seems that linking these concepts to measurable health outcomes has been about as easy as getting a cat in a bathtub.

SERVICE DOGS AND SUPPORT DUCKS

The benefits that service and support animals provide are much more obvious. Trained to perform specific tasks, service dogs assist people living with disabilities. For instance, some are trained to pick up dropped items or hit light switches for people in wheelchairs. Others are able to detect impending seizures in people with epilepsy or alert those with diabetes when their blood sugar levels are out of whack.

Sandi Holubik directs client services for Indiana Canine Assistant Network (ICAN) in Indianapolis. The group works with inmates at three Indiana correctional



(above left) Kanishka Roshan-Rawaan with Parker, a Saint Bernard. "I am his best friend and protector."



(above right) Brandon Shurr with his border collie companion Mazzy. "Best-ever walking partner."



Photo by Emilee Stites

(above left) Byron Wolter with King, a red husky-German shepherd mix, adopted from the animal shelter. "We rollerblade together. He runs after me when I skate."

(above right) Claire Stites, 8, with Snickers, a stray cat who adopted her family and soon after gave birth to four kittens on their back porch. "Snickers is one of the most kindest and gentlest kitties."



An Indiana Canine Assistant Network puppy. Courtesy photo

facilities to train service dogs. "They [the inmates] are the primary handlers," Holubik says. "They teach the different cues and commands the dogs need to know to become service dogs." Training a single dog takes about two years. Outside volunteers expose service dogs-in-training to a variety of real-world environments, from raucous sporting events to quiet church services. No matter the circumstances, Holubik says, "The dog needs to be able to cope and be well-behaved."

Taking part in ICAN's service dog sponsorship program, Cook Medical ponied up for a puppy named Charlie, who is expected to graduate in December. "Sponsorship gives you the naming rights and quarterly updates on the dog's training," Holubik says.

Training and real-world acclimation aside, pairing the right service dog with the right person also takes time. "Usually we have anywhere from three to four dogs meet probably a dozen people to see if one dog makes a better connection," she says. "Some dogs just naturally draw toward one person over another. They just may be more attentive to

a person and follow the cues better and more quickly." The ultimate goal? "I want the dog to be in that family and be a working dog for a good 10 years," Holubik says.

Gilmore notes that some Shalom Community Center clients are accompanied by service dogs, while others have support animals. The difference? Service dogs are trained to accomplish specific tasks to assist people with disabilities. Support animals provide people who suffer from anxiety, depression, and similar issues with a more general, emotional boost. Also, support animals aren't necessarily dogs. "We actually had some people who were living in our housing programs with support animals, including one household that had a duck," Gilmore says.

"The rules are different for service animals versus support animals," he explains. "Service animals are protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act. The law's a little bit different about support animals." And, he says, there are differences when it comes to a home and a shelter. "Fair Housing Law applies to moving into an apartment

and signing a lease and making reasonable accommodations for support animals, but there's a little bit of debate about whether that same law applies to overnight shelters."

Gilmore continues, "One of things that we do is work with other providers to help people understand the laws and what rights people have around service animals and support animals." Sometimes that entails showing potential landlords a doctor's or therapist's prescription for a client's support animal.

OVER THE RAINBOW BRIDGE

Sadly, companion animals don't live forever and, even as we grieve, the most immediate challenge is what to do with their remains. In the case of euthanized pets, many veterinary clinics offer cremation. Some send decedents out of town to Pet Angel Memorial Center in Indianapolis or Indiana Pet Cremation Services in Greenwood, but local cremation is also available. Wayport Kennels and Allen Funeral Home and Crematory are two such options.



(above left, l-r) Isabel Oleary, Connor Oleary, and Caitlyn Steele with loveable mutt Cubby, adopted from a shelter in Indianapolis. “We all like fluffiness, cuteness, and kisses from dogs. He’s very active and happy and likes to play.”

(above right) Steven Lucas and Gydgi, a Columbia red tail boa constrictor that his sister found. “It’s a buddy, keeps me company. Always had a love for these guys.”

Left with ashes, memories, and an emptier nest, coping emotionally with such loss is an ongoing trial. That’s why Natalie Crohn partnered with her veterinarian at Arlington Heights Veterinary Hospital to found Heal to Heal, a support group for people coping with the death of a pet. The group meets in Bloomington monthly. “People will come saying, ‘There aren’t a lot of people who understand what I’m going through,’” Crohn says. “Because there’s that stigma of, ‘Well, it was just a cat. It was just a dog. Can’t you go get another one?’”

She continues, “When a human passes away, we have a funeral, we have visitation, people come over and bring food, you take time off work, and it’s this ritual. And then, when a pet dies, it’s like society doesn’t really recognize that as a type of grief. And it truly is. I just wanted to have that forum, so people could come and get some support.”

Crohn encourages newcomers to show photos of their pets if they wish, and she often includes grief activities during the meetings. “We do a lot of listening,” she

says. “Other members will step in and say, ‘Oh, I remember going through that. This is what helped me.’ We talk a lot about coping techniques.”

Some attendees drift in, out, and then drift back in again. “If it’s the pet’s death anniversary or if it’s their birthday—there are things that trigger the grief again,” Crohn says. “It’s very similar to when humans grieve for a human loved one. If they see something or smell something that reminds them of their pet. You can tell that the person is being challenged again with the grief process.”

DON’T WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

While dogs and cats—and even ducks—might suit some people, others are looking for a pet that’s a little more exotic. If so, they need to know that Bloomington municipal code prohibits keeping crocodilians, pythons (or any snake species that can grow more than 12 feet long), and exotic animals like prairie dogs and primates.



Native species like turtles and frogs are also off-limits. In Indiana, it’s illegal to collect eastern box turtles or endangered species including the eastern mud turtle, spotted turtle, river cooter, alligator snapping turtle, Blanding’s turtle, or the ornate box turtle. Not only have their numbers been decimated by habitat loss, but it can take years before female turtles begin breeding, and turtle eggs are a favorite food for many predators.

As for frogs, although some may remember collecting and raising tadpoles as kids, things have changed due to the spread of some devastating diseases. Current Indiana regulations prohibit the collection and release of any reptile or amphibian from the wild unless the animal was caged by itself, captive for less than 30 days, and released in the same spot from which it was originally collected. “Since most people raising tadpoles would probably have more than one together and would probably have them for over 30 days, they would not be able to release them back into the wild without

a special permit from DNR,” says Nate Engbrecht, a herpetologist with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

Engbrecht explains there is a real danger that collecting and then releasing wild-caught animals—especially if they’ve been exposed to exotic pets—can introduce pathogens into local populations. “Imagine a situation where a kid catches a toad and places it into their aquarium with an exotic frog or newt they bought at a pet store,” Engbrecht says. “After a couple of weeks or months, they release the toad back into the wild where they caught it. But what happens if the exotic frog or newt they bought at the pet store has a disease and it is passed to the native toad while they lived together? When the toad is released back into the wild, it could cause an outbreak in the local population.”

Even creatures as seemingly pedestrian as goldfish can wreak havoc on native species in the wild. When dumped in natural waterways, goldfish go from cute to colossal in record time. Earlier this summer, the



(above left, l-r) Ian, Ally, Bridget, and Isaac Sons with their Chihuahua Cookie, adopted from the Clay County Animal Rescue & Shelter. “Cutest dog ever, cheers everyone up, hard-core chewer, loves to sleep on your feet, thinks she’s a cat.”

(above right) Heather Francis with Bruce, her labradoodle. “Bruce is part of our family, as our only fur baby.”



(above left) Jeremy Monroe, with Dusk, his husky companion. “Dusk is a great addition to our family.”



(above right) Madison Kuzma with her adopted companion Daisy, a cocker spaniel mix. “She’s my best friend.”

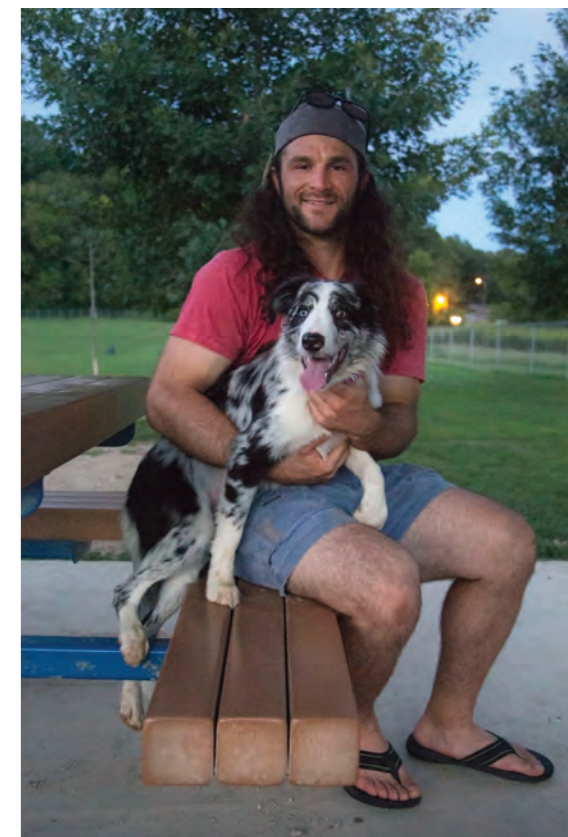
Indiana Department of Natural Resources reported finding scores of goldfish—some nearly a foot long—in northern Indiana’s J. Edward Roush Lake. A member of the carp family, goldfish mate prolifically with each other as well as with common carp, enabling them to aggressively outcompete local species.

Exotic lizards, snakes, and similar creatures also cause trouble in the wild. Fortunately, rescue groups like Bloomington-based Scaly Tailz—specializing in abandoned reptiles and amphibians—offer these animals a more sensible place to retire. Founded in 1997, Scaly Tailz recently worked with the Indiana University Non-profit Legal Clinic to secure official 501(c)3 nonprofit status. Aside from raising funds for the thousands of crickets and hundreds of mice it must purchase monthly to feed the creatures it rescues, the organization hopes to open a new location to accommodate more animals, volunteers, and visitors.

FROM HAMSTERS TO HORSES

Scaly Tailz isn’t the only unusual rescue operation in town. The Pipsqueakery, a self-described “rodent rescue and sanctuary,” gives medically frail hamsters a soft place to land. Caregivers there have looked after hamsters missing limbs and teeth, hamsters that were blind or deaf, hamsters with failing kidneys, diabetes, respiratory illnesses, and more.

Abused and neglected horses have their own sanctuary. The nonprofit group Horse-Angels has been rescuing horses since 2001. While some horses permanently retire there, others are restored to health and adopted out. And a horse sanctuary of a different sort, People & Animal Learning Services (PALS), has given at-risk youth, seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities a safe environment for therapeutic horseback riding since 2000.



(above left) Sydney Ziegler and Gilmour, a bichon frisé adopted from Bartholomew County Humane Society. “Gilmour is my best friend who came to me in a time that I needed him.”

(above right) Josef K Hosek and Maggy, a border collie. “Maggy and my relationship is like a sailboat.”



Coriander, a hamster who calls The Pipsqueakery home. Photo by Rodney Margison

HAPPY TAILS TO YOU

Life just gets better and better for canines in B-town. For the first time this year, dogs were invited to the movies when the Ryder Film Series brought The New York Dog Film Festival to the Buskirk-Chumley Theater in August. Dogs and their humans watched dog-related film shorts in a variety

of genres, including documentary, animation, and fiction. The cat-version came in September, but the cats themselves weren’t allowed to attend.

“There are just a lot of different places that you can take your animal,” Warren concludes. “There are quite a few dog parks, dog-walking trails, and dog-friendly restaurants—Bloomington

is just very animal friendly.” The latest friendly news is that the recently opened Graduate Hotel on Kirkwood is welcoming dogs as guests.

It’s not just dogs, though, that have it made. If you walk around Bloomington, you’re bound to see a cat on a leash. A parrot on a bike pole. A ferret in a basket. We even have a fish atop the courthouse. ✨