

Neighborhood Spotlight – Tawana Couch aka “The Animal Rescuer”

Tawana Couch has been rescuing dogs from Dallas streets and high kill shelters for over 30 years. Most of the dogs she rescues are flown to no-kill shelters across the country where they are adopted out. Tawana is also the founder and president of the Society for Companion Animals, which is a non-profit organization that pays to have the dogs transported to safer locations. But what you may not know is that Tawana is a Dallas native and grew up right here in Oak Cliff!

Tawana spent her formative years living in Elmwood before her parents moved to Wynnewood. Tawana and her family always loved Wynnewood North, although Tawana’s initial draw to Wynnewood appears to be because Wynnewood gave out the best candy at Halloween! To this day, Tawana carries on this tradition by faithfully giving out cupcakes and candy to any Trick O’ Treater willing to show up at her door. The Couch family moved to Wynnewood after they noticed 708 Mayrant appeared to be vacant. They tracked down the owner who agreed to sell them the house if they agreed to keep the cat who resided at the home. Ironically, the former owner had also kept a small horse in the house, but fortunately, the horse had moved with the former owner. Tawana’s parents then purchased the vacant lot next door and built the two-story home where Tawana’s mother still lives today

Tawana began to connect with rescue organizations in Dallas after she found a group of strays in the cul-de-sac. Her sister had been feeding the strays, but then they were picked up by the Dallas Animal Shelter. Tawana was out of town, but upon her return she went to the shelter to try and locate the dogs, only to find they already been euthanized. When Tawana realized the serious plight of stray animals, she immediately became an activist and advocate for those without a voice. One of the first things Tawana did was try and improve the visual appearance of the shelter which was oppressive and uninviting. Tawana realized the atmosphere at the shelter wasn’t conducive to anyone wanting to visit or adopt stray animals, so she offered to paint the facility. Tawana recruited a couple of artist friends who helped with designs and then recruited students from the arts high school to help paint the individual holding cages. One student artist painted the back of a dog and wrote, “if you adopt me, I will turn around.” Tawana was able to get publicity for the project by having the local news write about their efforts. Through her shelter work, Tawana was appointed to the City of Dallas Animal Commission where she served for 9 years. During her time on the commission, she advocated for the animals at the shelter and admonished the council that as a city, we can do better. Tawana fought hard for the new shelter to be built in Dallas, and together with the help of Elba Garcia, they were able to implement their vision of a new shelter that Dallas could be proud of.

In 2005, Tawana formed the non-profit, Society for Companion Animals (“SfCA”) to help educate people about strays for adoption. By 2007, she knew she wanted to do more to find placements for the dogs. While she was in Spokane, she noticed shelters were advertising animals for adoption and it was then the light bulb went on. Tawana spoke with those shelters and they agreed to take Texas dogs if Tawana could deliver them for adoption. Frontier airlines gave her a good price to fly the dogs and SfCA started a new chapter of rescuing animals. Through time, the program has grown, and now rescues dogs from all over Texas, particularly those in rural areas that have high kill rate shelters with little to no resources to help those animals. American Airlines now flies approximately 600 dogs a year to their new homes on the east and west coast, and if all goes well, SfCA may again be writing a new chapter of their story. In 2015, Tawana was approached by a producer in LA who suggested she try and develop a reality show

about her rescue work. They have now completed enough filming for three episodes, so keep your fingers crossed that there will be interest in picking up the reality show!

Tawana is proud of what her non-profit has accomplished but was quick to acknowledge that without her neighborhood volunteers and others helping at a “fast and furious pace,” she wouldn’t be able to accomplish a fraction of the rescues because her hardworking volunteers are the lifeline for the animals. SfCA relies solely on donations to help board, transport and fly out animals for adoption. If you want to volunteer or donate contact Tawana on Facebook, or donate through her webpage at www.societyforcompanionanimals.org or through PayPal or personal check.

I asked Tawana how she would like to be remembered and she said she hoped people would see her as compassionate, caring and kind; that she rescued starving, hopeless and hungry animals and helped them find love. But she didn’t just help the animals, she also made a difference in the lives of those humans who chose to adopt.