



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: Tuesday, April 7, 2026.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. Contact [Gage Harter](#) with any questions.

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Montgomery County

Program Title: Ruby: A Diamond in the Woolf - A Targeted Storytelling Campaign to Drive Animal Adoption

Program Category: Communications & Community Outreach

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Jennifer T. Harris

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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Angela M. Hill

Title: County Administrator

Signature: 

## **VACo Award Submission | Montgomery County**

### **Ruby: A Diamond in the Woof – A Targeted Storytelling Campaign to Drive Animal Adoption**

#### **Award Category: Communications and Community Outreach**

#### **Executive Summary**

The Montgomery County Animal Care and Adoption Center (ACAC) developed a targeted communications campaign to support the adoption of Ruby, a long-term shelter resident who had been in care for more than 500 days. Despite her positive temperament and training, Ruby's size and medical history presented challenges to adoption, requiring a more strategic and personalized outreach effort.

In coordination with a regional "Clear the Shelters" initiative, the ACAC and members of the County's Public Relations team produced and shared a video featuring Ruby through the perspective of a dedicated shelter volunteer. The campaign focused on authentic storytelling, emotional connection, and audience engagement through social media platforms.

The video generated more than 10,000 views, over 200 reactions, and more than 50 shares across platforms, significantly increasing visibility and community interest. The story gained additional traction through local media coverage and continued audience engagement in follow-up posts.

Most importantly, the campaign achieved its ultimate goal: Ruby was adopted after more than 510 days in the shelter. This initiative demonstrates how strategic, low-cost communications—centered on storytelling and community connection—can produce meaningful outcomes.

## **Problem / Challenge**

Animal shelters frequently face challenges in placing long-term residents, particularly those with characteristics that may limit immediate adoption appeal, such as large size, age or medical conditions. These animals often remain in shelters significantly longer than average, increasing strain on resources and reducing space for incoming animals.

Ruby, a 100-pound Anatolian Shepherd–St. Bernard mix, exemplified this challenge. Although she was house-trained, knew commands, and had a calm, friendly demeanor, a preexisting CCL injury and her large size made it more difficult to find a suitable home. By mid-2025, Ruby had been at the Montgomery County Animal Care and Adoption Center (ACAC) for more than a year.

Traditional adoption promotion methods had not resulted in placement, highlighting the need for a more strategic, targeted approach. The challenge was to break through audience fatigue, generate renewed interest, and connect Ruby with a potential adopter by presenting her story in a more compelling and personal way.

## **Program Implementation (Including Innovation, Collaboration, and Outreach)**

To address this challenge, the ACAC partnered with members of the County's Public Relations team to develop a focused communications campaign centered on storytelling and emotional engagement. Planning began in July 2025 to align with a regional "Clear the Shelters" initiative in August, which provided an opportunity to maximize visibility.

Recognizing that audience engagement often declines over the course of month-long campaigns, staff strategically positioned Ruby as the first featured animal—ensuring maximum exposure at the outset. The campaign's central component was a professionally produced video that told Ruby's story through the voice of a shelter volunteer who knew her well.

This approach represented a key innovation: rather than presenting basic adoption information, the campaign highlighted a genuine human-animal bond. The volunteer shared insights into Ruby's personality, ideal home environment, and the emotional impact of her extended stay at the shelter. Footage of the two interacting reinforced authenticity and created a compelling narrative.

The video was shared across the ACAC's social media platforms on August 1, 2025, targeting local citizens and potential adopters. Social media served as the primary outreach tool, supported by organic engagement and sharing. The campaign also benefited from indirect collaboration with local media, as the video was later requested for broadcast as part of the regional "Clear the Shelters" initiative.

This low-cost, high-impact strategy leveraged existing staff expertise, volunteer relationships, and digital platforms to create a meaningful and widely shared message.

### **Financing and Staffing**

The campaign was implemented with no dedicated budget, relying entirely on existing staff and resources. The primary investment was staff time from ACAC personnel and members of the County's Public Relations team, who coordinated planning, filming, editing, and distribution.

The use of in-house expertise and volunteer participation eliminated the need for external production costs while enhancing authenticity. This approach demonstrates that impactful communications campaigns can be achieved without significant financial investment.

### **Results and Impact**

The communications campaign generated strong engagement across multiple platforms. The initial video received more than 10,000 views, over 200 reactions, and more than 50 shares on Facebook and Instagram, significantly increasing awareness of Ruby's story.

The campaign's reach extended further when a local television station requested the video for broadcast, amplifying exposure to a broader audience. Continued engagement with follow-up posts demonstrated sustained community interest, with subsequent content reaching more than 32,000 views and generating hundreds of additional reactions and shares.

Most importantly, the campaign achieved its intended outcome: Ruby was adopted after more than 510 days in the shelter. The adopting family had previously been considering a smaller dog but developed a connection with Ruby through repeated visits and the emotional impact of the campaign.

Beyond a single adoption, the program highlights the effectiveness of strategic storytelling in animal welfare communications. By fostering emotional connections and leveraging digital platforms, the campaign successfully mobilized community engagement and produced a life-changing outcome.

## Ruby's Video Link

<https://www.facebook.com/share/r/18Ctbs4fRd/>


## Facebook Post Text:

**\*\*UPDATE: ADOPTED!\*\*** It's time to #ClearTheShelters! 🐶 Help us find a home for Ruby, our longest resident. She is a happy girl who loves car rides, splashing in puddles, and spending time with her favorite humans. 🐕 Volunteer Erin adores Ruby and knows her pretty well. Listen to what she has to say about this diamond in the woof! 😊

Please share this video!

cc: Rachel Lucas WSLs 10 News Clear the Shelters

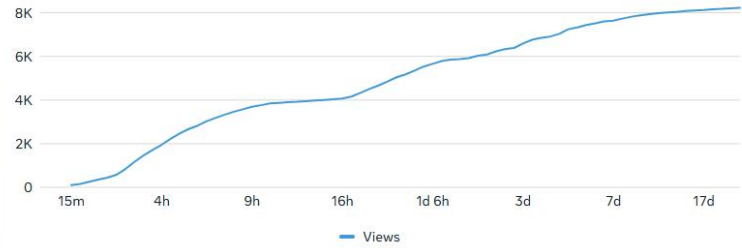
## Ruby's Video Stats

←  **Ruby - our longest resident**  
 Reel · Published on: Fri Aug 1, 2:00pm

Overview

This post's views are typical compared to your recent Facebook posts.

Views	Reach	3-second views	1-minute views	Watch time	Reactions, comments
9,201	5,219	3,042	0	17h 44n	307



From non-followers: 54.6%


From followers: 45.4%

Viewers: 5,563


Feed preview

Montgomery County Animal Care and Adop...  
 Published by Montgomery Virginia · August 1

JUPDATE: ADOPTED!\*\* It's time to #ClearTheShelters! Help us find a home for Ruby, our lon... See more



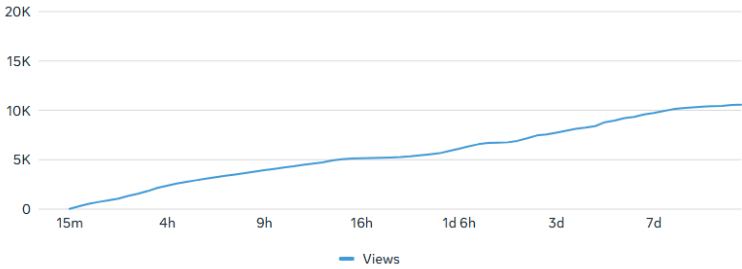
Boost

←  **Ruby - a Diamond in the Woof!**  
 Reel · Published on: Mon Nov 24, 9:35am

Overview

This post's views are typical compared to your recent Facebook posts.

Views	Reach	3-second views	1-minute views	Watch time	Reactions, comments
10,626	9,251	4,819	658	1d 8h	518



From non-followers: 59.3%


From followers: 40.7%

Viewers: 8,074

Feed preview

Montgomery County Animal Care and Adop...  
 Published by Montgomery Virginia · November 24 at 9:35 AM

by is thankful to have found her forever family after more than 500 days. We're thankful f... See more



Boost

374 likes, 44 comments, 26 shares

Like Comment Share

post relevant

Comment as Montgomer...

Christy Dillon  
 I'm not crying, you're crying!