In the Northwoods Animal Shelter's monthly "Paws Report," published on this page this week, you'll have an opportunity to read about the new programs and services it will be offering, including vaccinations, spaying and neutering programs and even a canine manners class.

June is also national Adopt-a-Cat Month, an ideal time to adopt a feline friend, since the spring and summer months typically bring a surge of kittens and cats to the shelter.

The term "shelter" dog or cat has long lost its stigma of connoting a scruffy or sickly "mutt." It's true, that some animals are at the shelter after being abandoned, abused or neglected, but the shelter volunteers strive mightily to care for both the body and spirits of their furry, four-footed clients so they can become your best friend and companion.

Not quite sure just what breed or breeds make up your canine bud? DNA testing services are available that can pinpoint the genetics of your new family member.

Shelter staff can also help you pick out a pet that they feel will be a good fit for your household and family. Visit the shelter, meet the animals and talk to the volunteer about your home life, work schedule and physical accommodations. They want to make a match. They'll also provide advice and suggestions for making a pet-friendly environment by eliminating potential hazards, from dangling cords to toxic houseplants.

When you adopt a cat or dog from the shelter, you receive the benefit of knowing you're giving a new life to a grateful animal. That "unconditional love" thing people talk about regarding their pets is true—to the extent that you're willing to return that love to your best bud in the form of responsibility and respect.

Open your home to a new life-long friend. Visit the shelter and meet the gang. One of them will surely capture your heart.

--Marian Volek