

northwest

Dandelion Dogs to the Rescue

Portland animal rescuers took lead role in hurricane-devastated New Orleans
by Jaymee R. Cuti

At 60 years old, Judy McCarthy of Dandelion Dog Rescue didn't expect her work would bring her to the epicenter of a national disaster. Yet after a large donation from a national pet store chain, she rounded up a caravan of dedicated volunteers and joined national efforts to retrieve animals suffering in the toxic flood waters of New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. During the seven weeks she spent in the region, before returning to her own rescue operation located in Forks, Wash., McCarthy broke down doors, crawled through rubble, climbed through attic space and duct work and reached her hand out to cats and dogs abandoned by their owners in the wake of a mandatory evacuation.

McCarthy's animal rescue work in New Orleans brought her to some of the most devastated neighborhoods in the city, where abandoned animals were wasting away, some after more than five weeks without food or clean water.

With strong support from Portland's gay and leather communities, Dandelion Dog Rescue became a lead animal rescue organization in the region after receiving a donation of 4,000 pounds of dog food and 2,000 pounds of cat food, along with leashes and other supplies from Petco.

"The first time I realized there was going to be a problem was when the news reported that people weren't allowed to bring their animals [during the mandatory evacuation], but I still had no concept of the magnitude of it," McCarthy said.

Once word spread that a Dandelion Dog team was preparing a rescue mission to the region, approximately \$6,000 in donations poured in, mostly from a network of leather mamas and daddies who are supportive of the lesbian-owned and operated organization. The Portland Lesbian Choir also donated a portion of its proceeds from a New Year's Eve dance to Dandelion Dog Rescue.

McCarthy and her team of three volunteers went by caravan to New Orleans, arriving Oct. 16, and immediately began setting up feeding stations throughout the city to draw hiding animals out.

According to volunteers, the animals had adopted a pack mentality, hiding by day and traveling in groups at night to search for food.

McCarthy's team joined a makeshift rescue headquarters staffed with volunteers from Muttshack Animal Rescue Foundation of Texas, Best Friends Animal Society of Utah, the Humane Society of the United States and individuals from across the country. The groups organized an Animal Rescue New Orleans team, which followed leads of animal sightings from other relief workers and police, navigated wiped-out neighborhoods and broke into many abandoned homes, searching for starving animals inside.

"We've taken the lead role in that we're a 501(c)3 nonprofit, so we're approved for all the federal funding programs," said McCarthy.

The team of 35 volunteers helped in rescuing

between 4,000 and 6,000 animals, and more were being found alive after

80 days without food and clean water, when McCarthy's team returned home seven weeks later.

On the street, rescue workers encountered dogs with broken legs, injuries sustained during the hurricane, acute digestive disorders, emergency births, dehydration, heart worms and various eye and body infections caused by noxious waters and sewage soaking the city.

"There are still 2,000 animals down there that haven't been rescued and that need a home," said McCarthy, as the city workers prepared to bulldoze huge sections of New Orleans' outskirts.

The Dandelion Dog team brought six dogs to the Pacific Northwest. Two were adopted after volunteers obtained releases from their owners. The remainder are in foster care for six months or until owners are located.

"The best-case scenario is always to reunite them with the owners," McCarthy said.

Photos of the rescued animals are posted on the organization's Web site, www.dandeliondogrescue.org, and at www.petfinder.com.

Dawn Webb, vice president of Dandelion Dog Rescue, who "directed traffic" and handled the paperwork end of rescue work from the Northwest while McCarthy was in New Orleans, described the rescued animals as "emotionally stunted."

"They need lots of patience and love. They'll love you forever because they know they're safe now," she said.

Government funds are set up to fly animals home to their owners from rescue shelters. The funds will also cover the cost of heart worm medication and other infections caused by the hurricane's aftermath.

McCarthy, who calls herself a "dog juggler," started Dandelion Dog Rescue, a no-kill shelter, 11 years ago on a five-acre facility. The organization has placed more than 2,000 animals in the past seven years, including llamas, goats, horses, ferrets, iguanas, a tarantula, a cockatiel, hens, skunks and a python. The property is also home to a community of approximately 40 feral cats.

The operation is making plans to move closer to its Portland volunteers and searching for a property in Northwest Oregon or Southwest Washington.

Dandelion Dog Rescue is seeking donations and volunteers to assist with the move of the shelter and relocation of dogs and cats from New Orleans to foster care in Portland.

"We're looking for a place to have a really beautiful facility where animals can play and be happy and healthy and can be rehabbed if they need it," McCarthy said. 



Slomo, a pit mix rescued from New Orleans, is loved by his new family, Lillith and Isabella Hedum.



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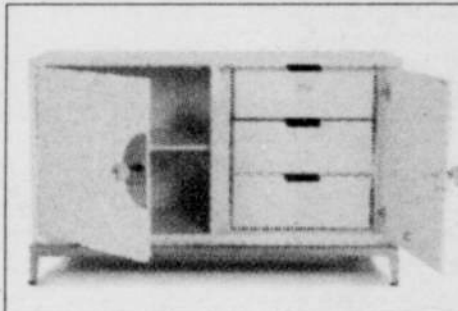
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