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On the Positive Side: Food bank helps feed area's needy animals

By Michel Meunier

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ACTion Programs for Animals (APA) started a pet food bank in Las Cruces in June. The goal of the program is to relieve animal suffering and help feed animals of families struggling financially so that people can keep their dogs and cats in their homes instead of relinquishing them to our municipal animal shelter.

As it is, the intake and kill/euthanasia rates per year at our shelter are sorely above the per capita average in the United States. We are still taking in about 17,000 homeless animals and putting down about 11,000 or more each year.

APA was forming and had been discussing the launch of a pet food bank when we were propelled into early action on this program with the receipt of two pallets of dog food from an anonymous source in May. That was the beginning, and each month, food is collected and purchased via hardworking volunteers and the generosity of those more fortunate.

People in Las Cruces have been donating food and money toward the purchase of pet food for many months. APA hopes that we can soon start applying for food and pet supply grants from national sources and grow the program to reach outlying areas as well as home-bound individuals.

The first monthly pet food bank distribution was held in June, and 1,500 pounds of food were distributed. In July, APA distributed 3,000 pounds of food. In August, about 4,000 pounds of food were

distributed, and APA had collected about 5,400 pounds in one month to help support the growing need. This month, APA distributed about 5,500 pounds. Overall, about 14,000 pounds have been distributed to help feed hundreds of cats and dogs.

Recipients are low-income, disabled, unemployed, elderly, homeless, etc. Some only need the help once or twice during emergency situations, and others are regular low-income recipients.

Those needing long-term assistance are asked to "pay it forward" by either volunteering to help the program grow or agreeing to become more responsible pet guardians (working with APA on getting pets vaccinated, fixed, into better living conditions, etc.). With the data collected from applications, APA hopes to identify the biggest areas of need for our next programs.

Through distributions, pet food drives, tables at local events, etc., APA is also involved in much-needed outreach with the community at large, which gets animal-welfare information to more people.

At each event, we strongly encourage responsible pet guardianship, we hand out information about low-cost vaccinations and spay/neuter services, and we listen to people about their pet issues and try to offer sound advice or refer them to someone who can help them. We are creating an increasingly bigger network, and we believe this is the only way our community can start the shift toward more positive and progressive approaches to animal welfare.

For more information about our organization and how you can contribute to our efforts, visit our Web site at www.actionprograms

foranimals.org, or call (575) 644-0505.

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Look for us next at our pet food drives Oct. 12 and 24 at the Sam's Club exit, and our booths at The Whole Enchilada Fiesta and Dia de los Muertos festival.

Michel Meunier is the president of ACTion Programs for Animals and the Las Cruces representative for Dogs Deserve Better (www.dogsdeservebetter.org). She authors a personal blog via the Sun-News Blogzone.

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