

The Pet Rescue Center
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Our goal is to work with the community and animal rescue groups to provide a no-kill, temporary sanctuary for pets in need of a home. In this effort, we will provide a safe, clean and caring facility to effectively enable rescued pets to find a family. In addition, The Pet Rescue Center will allocate financial grants, as they are available, to assist families undergoing financial hardship to provide lifesaving treatments for their pet.

Dear Pet Lover,

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce you to The Pet Rescue Center. Our goal is to work with the community and animal rescue groups to provide a no-kill, temporary sanctuary for pets in need of a home. In this effort, we will provide a safe, clean and caring facility to effectively enable rescued pets to find a family. In addition, The Pet Rescue Center will allocate financial grants, as they are available, to assist families undergoing financial hardship and to provide lifesaving treatments for their pet.

The creation of The Pet Rescue Center came about as a result of the following story and many similar experiences through the years. I met Crystal, a 9 month old black lab puppy several months ago. When I met her, she was definitely not at her best, but she was one of the sweetest puppies I have ever interacted with. She was brought into Alicia Pet Clinic for help with vomiting that had been going on for the past 3 days. Unfortunately, x-rays showed that she likely had a rock or toy lodged in her intestines; she was a very sick dog indeed with a high fever, severe dehydration and septic shock. Emergency surgery and care at the local emergency facility for the next few days would likely end up costing the owners thousands of dollars, which they did not have. Crystal was euthanized at 9 months with a treatable condition.

Why did this happen? Who do we blame? Do some people obtain pets that they cannot afford? Should the owners of Crystal have had pet insurance? Does veterinary care cost too much money? Do dogs misbehave in ways that injure themselves or make themselves sick? These are complicated questions with difficult answers. The care that Crystal needed would have easily cost over \$20,000 in the human health care field. Pet insurance would have offset the majority of the owner's cost and would certainly have saved her life. Because the owners did not have pet insurance they were faced with a heartbreaking decision that they definitely struggled with. They were a typical middle-income family trying to stay ahead in Orange County and simply did not have the means to spend the money to save Crystal. Many tears were shed by all those involved that day.

I have seen this situation played out many times over the course of my career, and I believe that these pets' stories are mostly silenced. Pet caretakers oftentimes feel guilty



Punch Wheaton, rescued at 4 months of age.

about their decision or are embarrassed about not being able to afford life saving treatments for their pet. Empathizing with the owners in these situations, veterinarians often tell owners that they are doing the right thing once they have made up their minds to euthanize. What choice do they have? It's a horrible situation and one that none of us wants to feel guilty about.

I want to make a difference in these pets' lives. I want to try to save more of these dogs and cats that are already in homes, bonded with their caretakers, loved by children and have the opportunity to live a long and healthy life after treatment. Most veterinarians take on these kinds of cases from time to time as finances allow, but that only saves a small percentage of these pets. Some non-profit groups exist to facilitate this kind of care, but most of them offer only limited funding. With the help of the community, we can allocate large dollar grants to pets like Crystal in the future. We can also do more than we are currently doing to save the perfectly healthy dogs and cats that are being killed all the time at our local animal shelters.

In South Orange County, we are lucky to have several no-kill shelters. Unfortunately, the cities of Laguna Hills, Lake Forest, Rancho Santa Margarita and Aliso Viejo are all served by Orange County Animal Services, which puts to death thousands of animals each year. Only about 1/3 of the animals that enter that facility leave alive. This is

the other, more commonly recognized tragedy facing many of our pets in Southern California. Some of these animals are making their way out of the "high-kill" shelters with the help of small rescue groups. Most of those groups have no facilities to house animals that they save, so they go to foster homes and await adoption. The shortage of foster homes and money, the lack of time and the scarcity of "face time" for these adoptable pets reduces the effectiveness of all adoption groups. The goal of most rescue groups is to save as many adoptable pets as possible and place them into excellent homes. I am going to make a commitment to improve all of our efforts to achieve that goal.

The Pet Rescue Center is a recently formed non-profit group that will work to help local rescue groups of Orange County place dogs and cats that they have saved from imminent death at shelters. The Pet Rescue Center will also have a grant giving arm that will work with Orange County veterinarians to save as many pets like Crystal as possible. My wife, Blythe Wheaton, our Director of Development, will be responsible for all fundraising efforts and development of The Pet Rescue Centers' cause. I will be supervising the day-to-day operations of The Pet Rescue Center and the allocation of grants for pets in need of life saving treatments that their owners cannot afford.

Everyone that has heard the plans outlined above has been very excited, but also surprised that we are planning to take on such a huge effort. Maybe there would be a better time in life to do this kind of thing. It's true that we are all busy; I have a wife, 2 small kids, 3 dogs and a busy veterinary practice, but aren't things just going to get busier anyway? There will probably never be the ideal time to take on an endeavor like this, but certain realities are making me not delay. First, I really don't know how many more pets like Crystal I can take. Experiences like that



Center Founder Matthew Wheaton, DVM & Director of Development Blythe Wheaton with their 3 dogs, all of whom were rescues.

pile up and push veterinarians toward burn out more quickly than anything else. Second, Alicia Pet Clinic is moving to a new facility a mile down the road, which leaves our current location vacant and already set up to turn into an adoption center. To build something like it later would cost at least \$150,000. The alternative is to just rip it all out and walk away.

The time is now! And that is why I am writing this letter to you. We need your help in this effort. For this to work, we need the help of those in the community that can donate money to our effort. We also need the cooperation of all of the local rescue groups to bring together a coalition of concerned people to house adoptable pets in a central location, which the public will be able to visit at least 5 days a week and 24-7 online. This will allow a more efficient way to find excellent homes for the pets in need of one, thereby decreasing the animals that are needlessly euthanized. We will also need volunteers to help with the care of animals at the site and during fundraising events.

My dear friend Josh Lanting, our Director of Operations, will be the backbone of our non-profit entity performing everything from adoption application reviews and volunteer staff management to website maintenance and accounting. He will also be our only salaried employee; Blythe and I will not be paid for our time and effort. Our fundraising goal for the first year is \$200,000. We will need your help to get there.

Please make the effort to give generously so that we can put The Pet Rescue Center in motion. It will take all of us to make a difference in these pets' lives.

Sincerely,



Matthew D. Wheaton, D.V.M.



How does your donation help The Pet Rescue Center?

-  Day to day cost to run and maintain the facility-ie. Rent & Utilities
-  Provide medical care, vaccines & flea control
-  Grants to families in financial hardship with a pet in need of lifesaving treatment
-  Adoption Website maintenance
-  Food, Leashes & Comfort
-  Microchips
-  Educate the public on responsible pet guardianship
-  Printing costs for educational materials and postage

