

Dog News

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SANDY vs. THE ALLIANCE

As the tri-state area continues to cope with the lasting effects of Hurricane Sandy there have been many uplifting moments and sightings amidst the growing anger, frustration and realization that life as many knew it will never be the same. Some two weeks after Sandy battered the Atlantic coast many residents still cannot enter their homes while others are still without heat and power and many pets remain displaced from their rightful owners. The Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals, which is the sole umbrella organization for animal welfare in NYC, is committed to keeping pets alive and well until they can return to their owners' homes or find other, suitable arrangements. The Mayor's Alliance, which is approaching its 10th Anniversary, works with a coalition of 150+ rescue groups and no-kill shelters and, despite the wrench named Sandy thrown into the equation, remains focused on its goal of transforming NYC into a no-kill community by 2015. A 501(c)(3) charity, the Alliance does not receive any government funding and it is not a city agency. If it indeed manages to achieve its goal despite the odds and the conditions, the Alliance blueprint is one that may be emulated around the country.

"Response in New York City for animals has been a collaborative effort," said Steve Gruber, Director of Communications for the Mayor's Alliance for New York City's Animals. "There has been a tremendous outpouring of support to NY shelters and the relief efforts."

Indeed, help has come from all around the country, from usual contributors and unexpected sources alike. The American Kennel Club and the Westminster Kennel Club have each donated \$10,000 to the Sandy Fund, which was created by the AKC Humane Fund. P&G Pet Care, makers of Eukanuba, IAMS and Natura Pet foods, donated some 44,000 pounds of dog food,

which the New York Yankees organization loaded onto trucks to be distributed to areas in need, while Nestle Purina donated pet food and litter to animal welfare organizations, veterinary clinics and hospitals in areas hit by Sandy, in addition to donating \$20,000 to Long Island's North Shore Animal League, creating an Emergency Pet Shelter in New York caring for more than 150 affected by the Super Storm, and donating \$15,000 to PetSmart Charities, which set up a temporary distribution center. The PetCo Foundation hosted a donation event and pet food drive, with Hill's Science Diet matching every bag of its cat and dog food donated up to 80,000 pounds. Groups from around the country, such as the Detroit Dog Rescue, also loaded up U-Haul trucks loaded with 7,000 pounds of pet food and supplies to reach those in

need. The outpouring of support has helped alleviate the pain of the situation somewhat, though it's hard to know how much more help will be needed, and it may take months before estimates of how many pets were lost or died as a result of Super Storm Sandy are known.

"Many people took in strays," Gruber explained. "It's going to take a while before they are reunited with their owners. Recovery is going to last as long as it lasts. It's hard to say exactly how long. If people are still interested in donating to animal shelters it's hard to nail down specific locations that are in need. They can still donate to the Red Cross or the Salvation Army, which has been one of the best ways to get supplies to pet owners."

Significant progress has been made since the deluge, according to Gruber, who cited a combination of planning, consolidating, pooling resources and "co-sheltering". Certain shelters were designated as 'hurricane shelters' throughout NYC. "In total close to three hundred owners and their pets came to the hurricane shelters," said Gruber. "Currently there are one hundred animals in hurricane shelters with their owners. Each day more and more are being moved to other locations."

In a city which is home to an estimated 1.1 million cats and dogs (600,000 dogs, 500,000 cats) according to the New York City Economic Development Corporation, with approximately 120,000 of those in hard-hit areas of Staten Island, those numbers would indicate that pet owners and city agencies took proper precautions and heeded warnings and instructions to evacuate before the storm arrived.

"Some pet owners were prepared, they moved before the storm," Gruber said. "Others came into hurricane shelters with their pets, which is what we wanted. It's always more effective to keep people with their pets rather than separated. Reunification can be tricky. Some people didn't prepare or didn't have the wherewithal." Gruber is also "very familiar with Wheels of Hope,

transport vans that starting evacuating animals since before the storm hit and moved them to other locations, which is a microcosm of the whole ef-

fort. We really put resources into the mix to be most effective."

There are many animals still in shelters that were not designated as 'hurricane shelters'; however, and more in makeshift shelters such as school gymnasiums. If the owners of these pets cannot yet return to their homes, Gruber explained, "we work with them by finding foster homes, boarding facilities or auxiliary shelters." Most of the pets in the shelters are cats and dogs, though there are birds, fish, reptiles, exotics and 'pocket pets' also.

Gruber stressed that the amount of teamwork and planning that went into disaster preparedness and relief has been instrumental in keeping the situation as manageable as possible, noting the collaboration between the Animal Planning Task Force, the NYC Office of Emergency Management, NYC Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals, and Animal Care and Control, as well as a network of other non-profits and city agencies. Rescuing animals is mandatory under federal law, and local and state governments must include plans for pets in emergency procedures. FEMA funds are now earmarked to go towards the welfare of animals in disaster zones, as past disaster experience has proven that the human-animal bond is so great that owners won't abandon their pets even under the order of evacuation, which can put first responders' lives in jeopardy and further hinder the rescue, relief and recovery efforts. NYC's human shelters must accept pets, as must taxi cabs and public transportation systems, which can be an arduous task in a city with as dense a pet and human population as New York's.

"It's been an amazing job by the Animal Planning Task Force," Gruber said, adding that they've been thinking about planning for such a storm since "shortly after Hurricane Katrina [in 2005]. Now the plan is in place and it's operational. Disasters are tough to prepare for. Different needs arise and it's about how quickly we can address those needs. The plan is there but it's being altered." Gruber admitted that at times they've been learning on the fly, but insists, "we've done many things right. It's an ongoing educational process. Many lessons were learned from Katrina. More people are aware of the need to prepare their families for disasters and pets are family."

Special thanks must be offered to the many human volunteers who have chipped in during the relief and recovery efforts. Without them, it simply wouldn't be possible. Gruber said, "I couldn't even guess how many. There are thousands of volunteers."

Off the Leash

BY SHAUN COEN