

Volunteers plan to rescue more dogs if enough gas money's raised

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ITHACA -There was Angie, Radar, Stitch, Ginger, Penny Lane and Martha. And then Angel, Baby, Diamond and Noki. Red and Rusty, the barkers, came along as did Trixie, Pumpkin, Goldie, Missy, Jasmine and Star.

Altogether, about 30 dogs and 14 feline friends were rescued from shelters in Louisiana and Mississippi, their stories and pictures hung on the west wall on the second floor of Juna's Café on The Commons Sunday for the Tompkins County Dog Owners Group social event. Thanks to the rescue coordinated by Sharon Garland, a veterinary technician at Meadowridge Veterinary Clinic in Groton, the four-legged creatures had been found new homes since their Nov. 18 arrival.

"It all started because of the hurricane and Dr. (Bridget) Barry, the veterinarian that I work with," Garland said. Barry had traveled to the storm-affected areas in Louisiana and Mississippi, part of the Veterinary Medical Assistance Team. She couldn't bring animals back, and so on Nov. 13, volunteers Sara Reynolds and Lezlie Kennedy filled a Penske truck with clothes and traveled to the region, picked up the furry friends Nov. 15 and returned. With shelters along the Gulf Coast overflowing with abandoned or surrendered pets, the women have planned a second trip into the storm-torn region...if they can find the funds.

"It all depends on when we get the money for the gas," said Garland. "Penske rental has helped us with the truck - we need money for gas and to put them up in a hotel for at least one night."

Garland said the first trip had cost \$2,500, with donations from Merial, Bayer and Pfizer veterinary medicine companies offsetting some of the animal treatment costs with donated drugs. Many of the dogs evacuated from the region suffered from heartworms and have to be watched carefully.

"Our veterinary hospital is paying for everything else," Garland said. She told the 20 or so assembled members and interested dog enthusiasts that foster homes needed to be prearranged for the second group of dogs because boarders and kennels are out of space. Although one canine mother doesn't seem to mind her temporary home.

"Angie," Garland said. "She's very stressed by everything. But if I had eight puppies and traveled thirteen-hundred miles with them in a truck, I'd be very stressed, too. She's adapted very well, and she loves it, just loves it. But she's very stressed right now." The eight puppies have since been found homes throughout the county.

Celebrating the year of the dog on the Chinese zodiac, bowls of specially-made fortune cookies adorned the tables while TCDOG members offered Chinese-food boxes of dog treats to those who turned out for the day's event.

"We're trying to make people aware of our organization," said Renata Cohen, TCDOG membership committee chairwoman. "We also are looking to keep them up to date about the dog park."

Located on adjoining City of Ithaca and New York State park property, the dog park borders Treman Marina on the west side of the Cayuga Lake Inlet. New York State Park Police have written tickets to dog owners who don't use leashes for their animals inside the park. Cohen said the waterside location remains ideal for the dogs and provides natural barriers, removing the expense and effort of maintaining fences.

"We're hoping the city will rescind the leash law," Cohen said. "If we're going to have the leash law rescinded entirely, we're also going to have to meet with state officials."