Orange County Animal Care Services



November 2007





fires throughout

A special thank you painting presented to ACS

Southern California forced residents to evacuate their homes in late October, Orange County Animal Care Services (ACS) quickly responded to those in need. With approximately 1,900 homes in Orange County and nearly one million people evacuated, and one-third of those evacuated owning one or more pets, there was a great need for facilities to house animals. ACS set up and oper-



ated animal housing outside of the Red Cross shelter locations at El Modena High School in Orange and El Toro High School in Lake Forest. 186 pets received board and care until their families could return to their homes. The response from the local community was overwhelming. Donated items such as bedding, food, treats and toys improved the animals' stay at the shelters. One man even donated a large bucket which was later used as a bath for a shedding python snake.

The evacuees' stories deeply touched ACS staff. Their resilience in a time of disaster was incredible. Fifteen year-old Kelsey and her family were forced to evacuate their home in Fallbrook along with their 52 show rabbits. When the family was turned away from crowded shelters that were already filled to capacity, they were relieved to find aid at the El Toro High School Shelter. Although Kelsey was an evacuee herself, she was eager to help the other families at the shelter. Daily she would ask ACS staff if she could walk Laini the English bulldog. Laini's family had to evacuate their home as well as ten seniors under their care from a nearby nursing home. While the family was providing care for the seniors, they entrusted ACS staff with their beloved Laini. Kelsey would happily keep Laini entertained by walking her around the evacuation shelter and providing her with food and water. The compassion Kelsey displayed was deeply moving and her ability to assist others in a time of need was greatly appreciated.

Several of the evacuated families showed devotion to their pets by sleeping near their

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pet's side in the outside corridors in the heat and smoke-filled air. Dori, another Fallbrook evacuee, felt that her cat Pepe was the only thing keeping her going during her stay at the shelter. Pepe was one of several animals at the Red Cross Shelter that showed signs of illness during the evacuation. The change in environment, smoke inhalation, and heat caused many animals to change their eating and drinking habits, which was cause for concern to their owners. A visit from ACS veterinarian Dr. Kieltyka eased many of the evacuee's minds as he provided free consultations, flea control, and various treatments for their pets. Dr. Trope, from Lake Forest Animal Clinic, also provided free veterinary services for approximately 20 evacuated animals.

After almost a week at the evacuation shelter, the evacuees began to relocate back to their homes. While many anxiously packed up their belongings to return home, others took their time taking photos, exchanging emails and hugs with the friends they had made during their time at the shelter. Saying goodbye was bittersweet as many of the evacuees had touched the lives of the ACS staff members they shared their stories with. The evacuees expressed their heartfelt gratitude for the assistance they had received during such a trying time. The appreciation ACS staff received made all of their efforts worthwhile and they felt fortunate to be able to lend a hand to so many during the fire evacuations.

Prepare for Disaster Today

What can be learned from these recent fires to help us prepare for the next disaster? Here are some tips from our staff who worked day and night at the temporary shelters:

- Bring a carrier, leash, and collar with ID for each pet in your family.
- Plan ahead for who will care for your pets if you are evacuated to a shelter. You will most likely have to do it in shifts.
- Bring toys to keep your pets occupied.
- Pack flea medicine in your emergency to-go kit.
- Make sure pets are up to date on vaccinations.
- Be prepared for extreme weather conditions.

Planning for a disaster does not have to be a disastrous undertaking. Remember that a positive, proactive approach is the best plan to make sure everyone and every pet stays calm, cool, and collected during an emotionally charged situation.

Any disaster that threatens humans, threatens animals as well. Prepare your whole family for disaster!



ACS by the Numbers...

150 Number of non-evacuated animals provided with food and water to sustain them until their families returned home.

100 Number of animals transported in the field to escape the flames.

186 Number of animals provided assistance at the El Toro H.S. and El Modena H.S. evacuation shelters.

Number of animals evacuated from the fires and impounded at the shelter. Animals impounded at the shelter included: Dogs, cats, rabbits, birds, horses, goats, sheep, pigs, llamas, snakes, guinea pigs, hamsters and mice.

Livestock Take Shelter

The Santiago and San Diego fires forced many families out of their homes, leaving them with no place to go with their livestock. When various equestrian centers, fairgrounds, and private residences heard about this great need, they opened up their properties to board the evacuated animals at no cost to the owners. Between 25 and 30 horses were housed at private residences. Some of the equestrian centers that provided assistance included: Oaks Blenheim, Coto de Caza, Serrano Creek, La Plata, Ortega, Carbondale, and Anaheim Hills. Animal Care Services staff transported donated fly masks, fly spray, bales of alfalfa, and grain to some of the equestrian centers.

According to Orange County Fairgrounds Head of Security Richard Groscost, they were able to house upwards of 135 animals. The Fairgrounds opened up their facility to evacuated animals from Sunday, October 21st to Friday, November 9th. Horses, donkeys, alpacas, goats, chickens, geese, and dogs were able to escape the flames and move safely to the fairgrounds. Not only did they provide free boarding to the animals, but they also distributed supplies that had been donated by the community. Volunteers offered assistance to the evacuated animals by mucking their stalls, providing grooming, and feed. Thank you to all of the groups and individuals who opened up their property to the evacuated livestock.



Experiences in the field

Many of the Animal Control Officers from Animal Care Services (ACS) had interesting, heartwarming, and exciting stories to share about their experiences working during the Santiago fire. Here are a few highlights from their memories of the fires...



"There was a couple in Williams Canyon that have a pig that runs loose on the property and another in a pen with some roosters. Sgt. Moon had attempted to make impound but the flames were already over the ridge and she had to leave the pigs behind and evacuate for her own safety. I went back the following day to see if the animals had survived. The pig came running up to me and all of the animals in the pen were fine. I fed and watered them. Shortly after, I went to an evacuee camp to make contact with the owners. The couple was there and approached me about their animals. When I told them that all the animals were present and accounted for, they began to cry. I told them that their home was also in good shape and they literally began to sob. They could not have been more grateful."

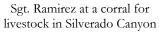
Lt. Waterman



"I was asked to pick up some pig food from an evacuee standing by in the Albertson's parking lot. After picking up the food I headed to the evacuee's residence in Silverado Canyon to feed and water the pig. When I met with the evacuee she was very grateful and thanked me over and over again. Our dispatcher gave me the address and information related to the call. The information read: 'Reporting Person says her pig is just through the front gate and to the left. The pig's name is Pork Chop and he DOES NOT LIKE MEN & IS VERY HUNGRY!' I fed and watered the pig with no problems. Thankfully, it was more interested in the food than in me." Sgt. Brett Crawford

"There are so many stories from this incident... Monday night, when the fire jumped Santiago and headed towards Silverado Canyon, we had about twelve trucks in the canyon, six outside Silverado and six inside staging at Carbondale Ranch. I cannot tell you how appreciative the residents were to see us there. Even though we were basically on standby, our presence was a reassurance that the County cared. They were even more comforted when an Orange County Fire Authority truck arrived and we did a walk-through of the facility. Seeing our agency's preparation and ability to work together to ensure the safety of the residents and their animals (over 100 large animals) was a great comfort to them. Things were a bit tense when the mouth of the canyon, the only exit, was blocked by fire. All of us watched as fire drew closer to our location. Again our presence was a comfort to the residents. The next morning they were able to evacuate almost all of the animals from the ranch." Sgt. Ramirez







"My favorite story about the fires is when Sgt Ramirez, Animal Control Officer Mazouch, Animal Control Officer Trainees Harding and Link, and I were at a residence on Santiago Canyon attempting to catch two wild pigs. For about an hour, we were chasing these two burnt pigs around the property. The situation was difficult enough, but it was made even more complicated by the fact that the entire property was covered in a layer of ash, it was pitch black, all of the structures on the property were burnt down, and the smoke was so thick we could barely see where we were going. Even worse, the pigs had tusks and were aggressive! The first pig went easy, but the second gave us a run for our money. Eventually, it jumped down into an eight foot deep ravine on the back of the property. We jumped in after it, caught it by the tusks with the catch pole, and put it on the soft stretcher. When it was over, we were all covered from head to toe in ash and exhausted. As chaotic as the situation was, Sgt. Ramirez laid out a good plan at the beginning and we successfully impounded the pigs, who were then treated and cared for at ACS."

Animal Control Officer Chiampi



Job Well Done

Each staff member at Animal Care Services assisted during the fires in some way. Here are a few quotes regarding staff involvement during the fires:



"We planned for this kind of emergency but to successfully execute those plans and save so many animals and help so many residents was an experience I will always remember and am very proud of."

Jennifer Phillips, Director of Animal Care Services

"The entire department [Animal Care Services] worked so well together; the best team effort I've seen in 17 years." *Susan Miller, Chief of Shelter Services*

"I feel very fortunate to have witnessed first hand Animal Control's response to assist the victims of the Santiago Canyon fire. The depth of knowledge of our Animal Control Officers and their incredible dedication to the animals and their owners has given me a renewed sense of pride. All of our Officers took their responsibilities very seriously. It was nerve racking hearing details of some of their rescues after the fact. I have to say that I am extremely proud of the quality and professionalism of the Animal Control Officers we have at ACS." *Donna Perez, Chief of Field Services*



Chief Perez, Sgt. Ramirez, Lt. Morgan and Lt. Evans at the ACS Command Center

Thanks a Million



those who donated supplies to ACS' efforts during the Santiago fires. Your contributions helped us care for countless animals at Animal Care Services and the various evacuation shelters for animals all over Orange County. Donations included: large and small crates, pet carriers, dry and wet food, cat litter, poop scoops, exercise pens, litter pans, small animal bedding, food and water bowls, spray bottles, pet shampoo, hay, and straw. ACS staff was overjoyed at the generos-

We would like to highlight the incredible efforts of Nikki, a Rancho Santa Margarita resident and devoted animal lover.

ity of the community.

Nikki coordinated a donation drive with the help of Animal Care Services Chief of Shelter Services, Susan Miller. Two donation drop-off centers were hosted by Nikki at Rancho Santa Margarita Beach Club on November 1st and at PetSmart of Rancho Santa Margarita on November 4th. With three truckloads of pet supplies and \$1,200 in monetary donations, ACS staff were overwhelmed by the generosity of the community.

Local businesses contributed to ACS' efforts as well, donating palettes of crates, hay, food, and other pet supplies. Truckloads of supplies would arrive at the shelter each day from another Orange County business. A special thanks to Petco, PetSmart, Anaheim Feed and Pet Supply, Wal-Mart, Hills Science Diet, and Target. We appreciate your generosity and assistance during a time of need.

