

# OPERATION: JUST PAWS



Special to the  
*Animal Guardian*  
from Lisa Carter,  
Director of the  
Santa Cruz SPCA

# Weeks after the disaster struck, Hurricane Katrina's animal rescue workers worked day and night in over crowded shelters where animals were lined up in crates to be processed into a system that was already bursting at the seams.



One of these helpless victims was Chloe, a Mountain Cur puppy that was

dropped off by her owner. He wanted her to be euthanized because her leg was "defected". Chloe was malnourished and traumatized. After spending her days in a crate, Hurricane Rita hit, destroying even more of the already crippled shelters. Chloe now enjoys the tranquility of her new foster home by the sea in Santa Cruz, California, awaiting adoption. Some say that Chloe flew across the country on the wings of an angel, and that angel is Doris Day.

In the days that followed Hurricane Katrina and subsequent evacuation efforts, the disaster area was crawling with hundreds of abandoned and lost animals. After experiencing emotional and financial devastation, families were forced to abandon their pets, leaving

their beloved companions tied to trees and fence posts, locked in attics and kennels, or placed on roofs above floodwater.

Of these animals, more than 100 untraceable but adoptable pets made their way to the Santa Cruz SPCA with the help of Doris Day. On September 30, 2005, Lisa Carter, Director of the Santa Cruz (California) SPCA, received an urgent email from Marie Bousard, a volunteer at the St. Martin Humane Society, in New Iberia, Louisiana. Marie's email, sent to shelters across the nation, explained that a previously scheduled airlift for over one hundred Katrina animals had fallen through. With all local shelters packed full of displaced animals, the animals awaiting the airlift would now face euthanasia.

Time was running out. Carter decided she had to do something, so she got on the phone and called anyone she thought could help. One of her calls was to a contact at the Cypress Inn, a luxurious, pet friendly resort in Monterey, CA, owned by Doris Day.

There, Carter left an urgent message for Doris Day. Less than one hour later, Doris Day delivered a miracle. "I really didn't think I would get a reply. But the phone rang and I just couldn't believe it. Doris Day didn't just come to the rescue, she jumped to it. I was so touched, I was genuinely speechless," said Carter.

Carter was informed that the Doris Day Animal Foundation would donate \$20,000 to airlift the homeless animals from New Iberia to Santa Cruz, where they could be placed for adoption. "I thought to myself, 'We have to help and we need to act now,'" stated Doris Day.

Carter's next task was to find a plane and a pilot, and assemble enough volunteers and supplies to get the rescue off the ground. For the next 10 days,



# When I looked into the animals' eyes I didn't know what to expect. I was afraid of what I might see. That's why we were here to help.

Carter worked night and day to coordinate the logistics required to accomplish the airlift. California based Peace, Love & Pets generously donated crates, and many other individual donors offered time, money and supplies.

On October 10, 2005 the airlift, named "Operation Just Paws," took flight and headed west, stopping in Lubbock, Texas, and Phoenix, Arizona to refuel. Volunteers were waiting at each stop to feed and water the animals and clean the crates.

As the plane crossed into the state of California, more than 100 volunteers from Santa Cruz traveled in a caravan of 70 vehicles to the Watsonville Airport, the plane's scheduled final destination. Volunteers drove through thick coastal fog to the airport only to receive word from the pilot that the plane would be diverted to the Monterey Airport due to the inclement weather situation. Quickly the team jumped back into their vehicles and sped to the new location to await the flying ark's arrival at a new location that was closer to that of their rescuer, Doris Day.

Finally, after 12 long hours in the air, Operation Just Paws touched down in Monterey. Volunteers clapped and cheered. Among the smiling faces waiting to unload the animals was Betsy Kennerly, longtime friend of Doris Day and representative of the Doris Day Animal Foundation. "The first animal Betsy unloaded was the three legged Mountain Cur puppy, Chloe. Betsy opened her crate, grabbed her and just held her. Betsy was amazing," stated Carter.

"When I looked into the animals'

eyes I didn't know what to expect. I was afraid of what I might see. What I saw instead was hope. Hope that we were here to help. Hope for a new chance at life," said Kennerly.

Betsy Kennerly was on the phone with Miss Day throughout the disembarkment, giving her minute by minute updates. "I was so ecstatic to hear that the animals were on the ground safely, now about to begin a new journey, one of love and healing," stated Miss Day, heartbroken that she couldn't physically attend the near midnight arrival because of a very bad throat. She had been advised not to risk exposure to the cold damp weather.

After unloading all of the over 100 cats and dogs, volunteers arrived at the Santa Cruz SPCA at midnight, where a power outage had left the shelter in the dark. Fortunately, volunteers and staff had prepared food and water in advance in the vacant municipal kennel that would now serve as the animals' temporary home. Working tirelessly until well after 3:00 a.m., the team made sure each and every animal was comfortably tucked into cozy beds in their kennels.

"Not one animal in our community was displaced to make room for the new arrivals," Carter said. Volunteers donated money and care supplies, including one woman who drove for six hours to deliver bedding and toys. The dogs and cats were given complete physicals by volunteer veterinarian Dr. Jennifer Condrey of the Chanticleer Veterinary Hospital of Santa Cruz and Dr. Todd Lawmaster, of Parkview Veterinary Hospital of



From the top: Scenes in Louisiana as preparations are made for the airlift. Bottom: Romeo with his new guardian in California.

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Monterey, CA, provided free spaying and neutering. More than 20 of the dogs tested positive for heartworm and required life-saving treatment.

Carter took small groups of the rescued animals to the Parkview Veterinary Hospital each week, where Doris Day came to greet them. “Doris Day took such a genuine interest in each rescued animal, she must have kissed every dog,” stated Carter. “I just know that each and every one of the rescued animals has such a special soul and I wanted to experience that for myself,” said Doris Day.

As the days, weeks and even months passed, volunteers and staff have continued to provide round the clock care for the rescuees. “We watched even the sickest and most traumatized animals blossom,” stated Carter.

As of February 2006, all but six dogs and nine cats have been adopted into loving homes. The Doris Day Animal Foundation and the Santa Cruz SPCA have been flooded with thank you letters from new owners. Sallie Weissinger, adopter of a dog named Daisy, said, “Daisy’s full name is now Daisy Day, in honor of Doris. Life is good, and getting better everyday.”

The Cartwright family wrote to the Doris Day Animal Foundation after adopting a dog, named Smokey. “We understand that, without your organization, we wouldn’t be so blessed,” said Diana Cartwright. “Thank you and your foundation for all your work, and the time you took to rescue those in need.”

Cats are getting new lives, too. Bonnie Sutterfield and Philip Zahm adopted Romeo, after falling in love with him at the SPCA shelter. “We took him home that night and he has been a delight ever since,” Sutterfield recalled. “We would personally like to thank Doris Day for her kindness in rescuing Romeo.”

“I love reading these letters and feel so grateful that we were able to help these animals who so desperately needed a second chance,” stated Doris Day.

“Operation Just Paws was an overwhelming success,” Carter said. “It’s been the most gratifying work I’ve ever done and we simply could not have done it without the help of Doris Day.”

“When Doris Day greeted each rescued animal, I wondered, ‘Do they know? Do they know that this is the person that saved them?’ Animals have an incredible ability to sense goodness,” said Carter. “When Doris hugged and kissed them, I know that deep down inside they knew, they could sense it. She was their angel.”

*Lisa Carter is Director of the Santa Cruz SPCA. Founded in 1955, the purpose of the non-profit organization is to ensure the best possible quality of life for animals and to promote respect and reverence for all life. The Santa Cruz SPCA receives no public funding and is supported solely through the generosity of its donors.*

**Top to bottom: The plane used in the airlift, with DDAF’s logo stenciled on its side; Daisy with her new family in California; From left, co-pilot Sheila Mabbitt, DDAF’s Betsy Kennerly and Santa Cruz SPCA (Board) President Kate Moore; Teddy, a beautiful Golden mix, is another lucky dog who was adopted into a loving home; The volunteers in Louisiana pose prior to the plane’s departure.**



*We were inspired by all the people who came from everywhere just to pitch in and do something to help. We were glad to be a part of it...*

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*... we cleaned cat cages, used crow bars to open windows or doors to get food to animals in need,*



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*slept in cars, ate cans of beans, worked 20 hour days and felt exhilaration, exhaustion,*



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*frustration, fear and hope, sometimes all in the same hour.*



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