


SHOW ME THE MONEY

Merlot and Malteses: A Magnificent Mix

Shelters' "yappy hours" provide opportunities for mingling and money-raising

BY CHERYL A. FALLSTEAD

Are you whining for a new fundraising idea? How about a little bruschetta with that wine? Perhaps some crackers and dog biscuits, too?

A happy hour for dogs and their human companions may be just the event you need, bringing in extra cash while also boosting your organization's reputation.

And partying in the company of canines makes a happy hour that much happier: Envision a winery or tasting-room patio filled with dogs and their owners visiting with friends old and new. While the humans sip and nibble on people treats, the dogs indulge their own senses through requisite sniff-downs. A nearby lawn is dotted with excited canines, entangling their owners in leashes as they maneuver to meet another new pal.

That was the scene at a recent "Yappy Hour" held by the Doña Ana County Humane Society in Las Cruces, New Mexico. The interspecies interactions, which take place monthly from April through October, help the shelter turn this event into more than a fundraiser: it's also an effective "friendraiser" that allows for program promotions and introductions to board members and staff, says volunteer and marketing director Laura Bosh. An average of 70 locals and their leashed and vaccinated pets attend each event, happily handing over the suggested donation of \$6 per person or more.

The right location is key—people won't exactly jump at the chance to sip drinks among barking shelter dogs competing for attention in their kennels, no matter how cute they are. For two years, the shelter held its Yappy Hour at the dog-friendly Blue Teal Winery Tasting Room near historic Mesilla; the walled patio and fenced lawn area made it a perfect venue.

When Blue Teal moved to a new location without a suitable outdoor area, the humane society found a new spot to hold this year's Yappy Hours: Eddie's Bar and Grill in Las Cruces, where attendees can

drink "Barkeritas" and "Pawsmopolitans" and enjoy dinner on the patio. Canine partygoers can score some food, too; the shelter raffles off pet food and sells goodie bags for \$3 each.

Newcomers to the growing town of Las Cruces find Yappy Hour a helpful source of information about all things dog-related, gleaned recommendations for vets, kennels, and pet supply stores. Dogs develop social skills they might otherwise be deprived of in this town with no dog park.

Yappy Hour is easy to run: The supply box is always ready to go and includes a cash box for donations, copies of the shelter newsletter, sign-in sheets, and tickets and donated items for prize drawings. Bags are available to owners who need to pick up the inevitable deposits on the lawn. Local businesses donate snacks for both the two-legged and four-legged diners, and water bowls quench the thirst of the excited pups.

While Yappy Hour doesn't rake in the dough, financial windfall seems to fol-



In a town without a dog park, area pooches can go to the Doña Ana County Humane Society's Yappy Hour to socialize with others in the great outdoors. CHERYL A. FALLSTEAD

low in its footsteps, says former board president Dona Hearn. "Funds raised and contributions given often result from the acquaintances made and their introductions to us at Yappy Hour," she says.

Also seeing their local shelter through wine-colored glasses are animal lovers in Washington state, whose lucky dogs get to run off leash and swim in the pond at a Yappy Hour coordinated by the Chateau Faire le Pont Winery and the Wenatchee Valley Humane Society. For its human patrons, the winery offers dinner and discounted wine during the festivities.

Like her counterparts in New Mexico, Executive Director Pam Baker describes the event as a "friend maker" that helps people learn about the shelter, meet other dog owners, and socialize their animals in an otherwise dogparkless city. A staff member attends with adoptable dogs, and volunteers do the rest. Some evening lineups even include agility demonstrations and other special activities.

This year, the organization plans to step up its advertising and develop more fundraising opportunities at the event, which generates a minimum donation of \$5 per dog for the humane society. Baker predicts attendance will continue to grow. The first Yappy Hour, held on a hot night, attracted only seven visitors and their dogs, but by October, attendance grew to 30 people and about 20 dogs.

By finding the right location and getting the word out, shelters can provide another service to the pet-owning community, raise much needed funds, and wine and dine with the best of them—the incomparable canine set. **AS**

Freelance writer Cheryl Fallstead lives in Las Cruces, New Mexico, with shelter dogs Schotzie and Sullivan. Yappy Hour encouraged her to become a humane education volunteer for the Doña Ana County Humane Society, while one of the shelter's poodle puppies recently encouraged Cheryl's parents to adopt him.