

**SHOW ME THE MONEY**  
BY KATINA ANTONIADES

# It's My Party (and I'll Go to the Shelter)

Organizations get festive to raise funds and educate kids

**I**nviting big groups of kids to your shelter is probably not on your to-do list. Children who tease the animals, stick their fingers into cages, and run around shrieking and getting in the way of potential adopters? Sounds like a nightmare.

But some shelter staff aren't cringing over kids—in fact, they're throwing a party. Many organizations are encouraging kids to come to the shelter to celebrate their birthdays, and instead of a nightmare, it works like a dream: Children enjoy fun and educational activities, busy parents get to escape party planning, and shelters get to mold future responsible pet owners while raising funds at the same time.

The Animal Rescue League of New Hampshire started throwing birthday parties in early 2006. The organization launched the program to reach out to the community, but by January 2007, they'd found it was also an effective fundraiser: Nine parties into the program, they'd brought in \$1,150. Expenses totaled about \$240, says Danielle Hastings, director of adoptions and customer service—leaving a net gain of \$910 for the shelter.

Although today the events are successful, the shelter's first party was a challenge. When it was time to give the

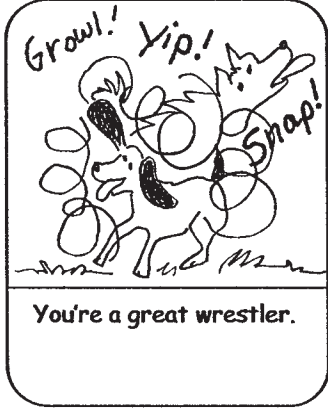


Kids who celebrate their birthdays at the Animal Rescue League of New Hampshire can enjoy something even better than cake and ice cream: the chance to name a shelter animal. ANIMAL RESCUE LEAGUE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

kids a shelter tour, the place was already packed with people checking out pets. "Having a group of 12 kids in the cat room while we're trying to show cats to potential adopters, it was just not a good idea," says Hastings. "The cats were stressed."

The organization decided to keep parties on the weekends but to reschedule them from 3 to 5 p.m. "We do the tour the very last [thing]. ... At that point, the shelter's really [only] open for another 15 minutes ... and that's just much better," says Hastings.

## Dog Park



The events, which take place in a multipurpose room away from animal housing, combine learning and fun. Diane Frost, the organization's humane educator, talks to kids about pet care, responsible pet ownership, and safety around animals; older kids might also hear from an animal cruelty investigator. Despite all the possible distractions, the kids pay attention to Frost's presentations, as Hastings discovers during the tours she leads. "I love hearing all the things that she has already told them," she says. "When they're going to the animals, [they say], 'Oh, don't put your finger in the bunny's cage—because they think it's a carrot.'"

Although seeing the animals is exciting for the kids, Hastings strives to make the shelter tour educational as well, discussing what a shelter does and talking about reasons the animals are there. Groups of older children often get to spend time with a shelter resident—either a small animal or cat.

When parents spring for the more popular "Deluxe" party—at \$150, it costs \$20 more than the basic party—the shelter has even more in store. Kids receive goody bags that each contain a dog bite-prevention coloring book and a few items with the shelter's logo: a pen, a bumper sticker, and a lollipop with a humane message like "Be kind to animals."

At the deluxe parties, shelter staff also bring in an animal who is about to go up for adoption and allow the birthday child to name him. Although the names kids come up with are often not the most original ones the shelter has heard—"We have a lot of Blackie, Smoky, Shadow," says Hastings—some have been more creative, like Flower or Chino.

In many cases, kids bring something for the animals, too. Parents often include an insert in party invitations that lists items on the shelter's wish list, and most partygoers come bearing gifts, from dog food and cat toys to towels and blankets.

Like the Animal Rescue League, the Rancho Coastal Humane Society has also received donations through parties

held at its Encinitas, California, shelter. Birthday boys and girls have often asked for toys, treats, or money for the animals in lieu of birthday presents. The organization provides the birthday child's family with a wish list, and often, a kid will arrive with a big box of goodies. "It's ... good for families who are teaching their kids about the community and helping out," says humane educator Erin Gorence. "It's a good way to have a fun party and still do something good with your birthday."

Charging \$125 for a two-hour event, the shelter has thrown 20 to 30 parties in the first year of the program, raising a few thousand dollars for animal care. Parties are open to kids ages five and older; most are between six and twelve. Groups of 15 to 20 partygoers play animal-related games, help make treats for the shelter animals, take a shelter tour, and sometimes meet one of the shelter's "animal ambassadors." "They don't even notice really that they're learning, because they're having so much fun," says Gorence.

The tours take about half an hour and offer children a behind-the-scenes look at an animal shelter. Although the tour is aimed at the kids, parents get an education, too. "A lot of times, the children have very open minds about animal shelters," says Gorence. "But you can see as you walk through with the parents that their ideas are changing about it—because there's still a lot of stigma of a 'dog pound' ... It's a good opportunity to get that mindset out of people."

Gorence occasionally encounters another common misconception. Sometimes "people [come] in kind of thinking they're coming to a petting zoo, and you have to make it very clear that this is not a zoo; this is not unlimited animals you can meet; you don't get to pick the animals," she says.

More often than not, though, the parties run smoothly—and Gorence hopes that by reaching young kids with information about the work of shelters and the humane treatment of animals, the impact of the day's events will be far more valuable than anything inside a gift-wrapped box. AS

Look what we have in animal transportation...



Adoption/Rescue Trailers



Trailers and Boxes



Slide In Units



Chassis Mounts



Stainless Steel and Aluminum Construction. Custom Design and Fabrication our Specialty.



Jones Trailer Company

P.O. Box 247  
Woodson, TX 76491  
940-345-6808  
Fax: 940-345-6505  
1-800-336-0360

www.jonestrailers.com