

## People Power

BY JAMES HETTINGER

### Operation Roger

**One word:** For Sue Wiese, that's how it started.

Wiese, a pet-loving truck driver from Joshua, Texas, was driving down the road shortly after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast in 2005, thinking of the pets stranded by the storm. She remembers turning to prayer: "'Lord, what can I do? I'm just a truck driver.' And I heard in my head one word, and that was 'transport.' And I go, 'Huh? What do you mean, transport? How am I supposed to transport?'"

After the word came to her, Wiese visited *Petfinder.com* and realized that the need for responsible long-distance pet transport wasn't just limited to disaster situations. She screwed up the courage to call Bill Mack's XM Satellite Radio show for truckers and say, "I'd like to know if there are any truck drivers out there interested in an operation of moving rescued pets across the country using our trucks." By the end of her 15-minute interview she had about a dozen calls to return.

That day—Sept. 16, 2005—marked the beginning of Operation Roger ... Truckers Pet

Transport, a nonprofit initiative that uses truck drivers to move pets from animal shelters and rescue groups to new permanent homes.

**We got ourselves a convoy:** The all-volunteer program, which was named after Wiese's late Manchester terrier, has about 50 active regional and long-haul drivers, says spokesman Tony Hamilton, and by late 2008 it had moved more than 300 dogs, cats, and other small companion animals.

"It's a weird situation," concedes Hamilton, a Chihuahua-owning trucker. "We've developed a deal that ... can't work, and we've made it work. Through sheer determination, we've made it work."

Shelters, rescue groups, and individuals with pets to move go to *operationroger.com* to get a pet posted on the organization's pet board. They must pay a \$22 fee to offset expenses, pack five days' worth of food, provide current shot records and health certificates, and meet a variety of other requirements. Operation Roger tries to match the pet needing a lift to a trucker heading in that direction. The truckers carry one animal at a time in the cabs of their trucks,

treating them as if they were their own pets, Hamilton says. "If the driver eats a sandwich, he'll give a piece of the sandwich to the dog," he says. "I mean, it's just that way. We're all pet lovers."

**Keep on truckin':** Ideally, the program finds a driver going straight through to the pet's destination. When that can't be arranged, Operation Roger utilizes "layover homes" (temporary foster homes where the pet can stay while awaiting her next ride) and/or "shuttle drivers" (typically people who can't provide a layover but can drive the pet to the next destination). As it tries to build a nationwide transportation network, Operation Roger is looking for more truck drivers, layover homes, and shuttle drivers, as well as private pilots willing to help, Wiese says.

Rescue groups say Operation Roger is a godsend when someone from out of state falls in love with an Internet posting of a rescued pet. The truckers have delivered dogs who would not have gotten to new homes otherwise, or who would have gotten there only at great expense, says Carol Lawrence, director of Creek Pet Adoption in Kellyville, Okla.

"Anytime I need them," adds Ginger Barnes, owner of All God's Creatures Pit Bull Rescue in Lipan, Texas, "all I have to do is call, put my application in, and they're there for me."

For more information on Operation Roger, call 682-622-1172 or go to *operation-roger.com*.



BRANDY PETERS

Trucker Kris Peters holds Misty, a 22-month-old Jack Russell terrier mix, who he recently transported from a rescue group in Springfield, Mo., to a new home in Prescott Valley, Ariz. Misty is one of many animals Peters has helped relocate through Operation Roger, a volunteer program that matches pets needing a ride to truck drivers heading their way.



JOHNNIE MALEN

Truck driver Nancy Regan, center, recently delivered two new dogs, Tsuki and Miko Panda (at right), to the Malen family of Orlando, Fla., including Greg Malen, Kaylin Speigle, and the family's other dogs, Arthur and JoLee (left).