

SHOW ME THE MONEY \$
BY JAMES HETTINGER

The Art of the Matter

California fundraiser aims to grow a more humane community

At the Art for the Animals fundraiser, it's the thought that counts.

Sometimes the thought produces a child's crayon drawing of a stern-looking pig with ears that appear to be coming out of his back. Other times it results in an adult artist's perfectly rendered, elaborately framed painting of two cocker spaniels.

But the idea behind all of the submitted artwork is to benefit, via an annual online auction, the Riverside County Department of Animal Services in California—and to plant the seeds for a more humane community.

"It's kind of what I call a very humble fundraiser," says John Welsh, the department's public information chief. "The beauty behind Art for the Animals is it has what we believe to be a beautiful subliminal impact, especially on the young people. They're creating something that is a donation to us. They understand that ...



Art for the Animals emphasizes community involvement, drawing entries from area artists such as Nicolette Baker Wenzell, left, and Relly Peckett.



RIVERSIDE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF ANIMAL SERVICES

if their piece of artwork is bought, even for \$10, they've just made money for an organization that we like to think ... [is] doing good work."

When children create art for the auction, they may become aware of more serious animal issues, such as the need for spaying and neutering and the importance of reporting animal cruelty. "The more we build those relationships, we think that the future of Riverside County—and of course, in the long run, America—will be better, because you've got a lot more people respecting animals and growing up with that perspective," Welsh says.

Art for the Animals, which was held for the sixth time last December and raised about \$1,100, typically attracts about 300 pieces of artwork (as well as animal-themed poetry, fiction, and non-

toward more extensive medical care for a shelter animal, such as fixing a dog's broken leg through one of the shelters' veterinary partners. "All of this is just trying to promote that message of respecting animals, caring for animals, and trying to do something a little bit extra for them," he says.

Prior to 2008, the department conducted the art auction through what Welsh calls "a poor man's version of eBay." Bidders viewed the artwork posted on the department's website and submitted bids via e-mail—a process Welsh says was "very clunky, but it worked."

For the 2008 auction, the organizers decided to use the real thing—eBay itself—with mixed results. "The attraction was to be more modern and hip," Welsh explains, and eBay, unlike the original system, enables bidders to respond immediately when they get outbid.

But Art for the Animals encountered some glitches on the international online auction site. Confusion over the language the department used to describe itself caused eBay to shut down the auction for a day or two, so that people looking for it couldn't find it, Welsh says.

Still, Welsh doesn't view the eBay experience as a failure, and the department is open to the possibility of using it again this year. "For us, it was a learning curve," he says. "... It was exciting to be on eBay."

Sometimes, Welsh notes, the message is more important than the money: "[By] getting kids to donate artwork, and getting them fired up about animal issues and animal causes, we may be converting the next generation of veterinary doctors and animal care technicians."



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"Porks," a crayon drawing by fourth-grader Brianna Gutierrez, captured a first-place award in the 2007 Art for the Animals, a fundraiser for the Riverside County Department of Animal Services in California.