



Helping People Buy and Sell Homes —and Putting Pets in Them, Too

Real estate agent creates program to promote shelter adoption

BY KATINA ANTONIADES

of a loss. Last fall, real estate agent Collette Blanchette's two Yorkshire terriers, Cujo and Scruffy, got loose and disappeared. They were never found, despite help from both a pet detective and a bloodhound.

While searching for her dogs, Blanchette frequently checked for them at the Ramona Humane Society in San Jacinto, often visiting two or three times a day. While she didn't find her dogs, what she saw there spurred her into action. "Going in there was so sad because there are so many animals," she says. "We have a relatively small city, but they're just euthanizing so many animals every year because of overpopulation, and people just not caring, so I wanted to do something to alleviate the situation in some small way."

Blanchette approached Brubaker-Culton and the Ramona Humane Society with a proposal to which they both agreed: the company would offer a voucher for the adoption of a pet from the shelter to clients who bought or sold a house through the company. If an individual or family already had a pet who happened to be unsterilized, the voucher would be good for one free spay or neuter surgery.

Brubaker-Culton now promotes the "Free Pet with Purchase" in every advertisement it prints; the company has offered hundreds of adoption vouchers to clients. "It's been pretty successful. ... We've saved, I think, six or seven pets so far this year," says Blanchette, who once again shares her home with a furry friend after adopting a dog herself.

To Jeff Sheppard, the Ramona Humane Society's executive director, the true success of the promotion isn't measured in numbers. "We've had several [adoptions]; we haven't been bombard-

ed as we wish we would," he says. "But you know what? If we had just one, the program is a success."

When potential adopters seek to redeem the vouchers, they're still required to meet the shelter's regular adoption criteria, says Sheppard. Without a voucher, adoption fees at the shelter, which include various services and products, are \$97.50 for dogs and \$65 for cats. The certificate allows for adoption of any species.

Sheppard feels grateful for Blanchette's help. "No one knows how bad it is until they come into the facility and they see how many homeless pets there really are," he says. "And when they take that matter into their own hands or when they accept the responsibility that it's all of our jobs—not just mine or my kennel or whatever—it's all of our jobs to take care of these animals, it's a good feeling."

Brubaker-Culton's clients appreciate the program, too. "I remember one client recently, she just moved into her first house, and she had a son who had just lost his dad," says Blanchette. "And they sort of had limited means, so it was just great; she was so appreciative of the opportunity, and [it was] the perfect thing her son needed to help him through the time that he was going through."

Blanchette hopes the program will start a nationwide trend among companies of all sorts. "It would help to alleviate the huge problem with pet abandonment and overpopulation," she says.

You don't have to be in the animal welfare field to make a difference for animals, Sheppard adds. "If everybody put their heads together and used their expertise to help the less fortunate, what could we accomplish?" 🐾

WHO SHE IS: Collette Blanchette, a real estate agent in California

WHAT SHE DOES: Finds and sells homes for humans—and while she's at it, finds homes for local shelter pets

WHAT SHE HOPES: That companies around the country will borrow her idea to help reduce pet overpopulation

"Free" is a word you don't hear very often during the process of buying a house. The house inspection, the appraisal, the closing costs—pretty much the only thing you don't have to pay for is the smorgasbord of snacks your settlement company provides to munch on at closing.

Clients of Brubaker-Culton, a real estate company in southern California, receive something much more special than munchies when they buy—or sell—a house: the opportunity to adopt or sterilize a pet free of charge. The company began its "Free Pet with Purchase" program earlier this year after one of its agents pitched the idea.

The plan to find pets for clients and new homes for shelter animals grew out