

## Doggie Décor

Kennel-decorating contest brings visitors and fun to a Maryland shelter



The title of this kennel is “Camping in the Vermont Woods,” and despite being hundreds of miles from that state, resident Pepper makes herself at home, often sleeping in the tent or the camp chair. MICHELLE RILEY

**T**he Maryland SPCA is in Baltimore, but this July, shelter visitors found themselves in far-flung places like Japan, Germany, Holland—and even Margaritaville. Staff and volunteers decorated almost all of the facility’s 39 dog kennels with summer-vacation themes. The dog runs were full of eye-catching color, from an inflatable pink flamingo in the “Hawaii” kennel to a bright blue tarp that represented Niagara Falls.

Armed with their creativity and \$2 budgets, 20 teams had three days to complete their chosen themes. Some came in on their days off, and many bought extra

supplies with their own money. Shelter visitors voted for their favorites from July 18-28, and to cap off the promotion, staff and volunteers brought several dogs to Baltimore’s Inner Harbor for a “vacation” at the end of the month. Once the votes were counted, ribbons denoted the winning designs—which were also announced on the SPCA’s website—and members of the top three teams received restaurant gift certificates and SPCA-logo clothing.

In this excerpted interview, Maya Richmond—director of program development and operations and creator of the decorating contest—spoke with *Animal*

*Sheltering’s* Katina Antoniadis while teams put the final touches on the kennels.

**AS: What prompted you to start the decorating contest last year?**

MR: In July, we want to do promotions around adult dogs, so we started last year with something called Dog Days of Summer. It is the last two weeks of July, and it can be a combination of events—partly the decoration of the cages. We did a survey a few years ago that found out that a lot of people thought of the shelter as a cold, dark place. When people do come here, they’re pleasantly surprised—the animals are well cared for;



The dog who lives in this "Margaritaville" kennel could possibly be out searching for his lost salt shaker, but he'd probably prefer a cheeseburger in paradise. MICHELLE RILEY



Kennel technician Danyelle Reid (right, with surgical technician Timea Molner), came in on her day off to finish decorating the "Ocean City, Maryland" kennel for her canine friend Atticus. Reid took part in the contest to get to know her coworkers better and spend more time with the animals. "Winning wasn't my main goal," she says. MICHELLE RILEY



Kennel technicians Brynn Hardcastle (right) and Lee Pine (left) chose a German theme for this kennel. Pine hoped a dachshund or German shepherd might lend a touch of authenticity, but the current resident of this dog-haus is a Lab mix named Howie. "He was a little confused why his cage is so decorated, but he's been a really good sport about it," says Pine. MICHELLE RILEY

it's bright; it's airy; they're out and about on the grounds. We learned that the number-one way people who come here find out about our organization is word-of-mouth. [The decorating] brings a lot of people in just to see what's going on, and I know for a fact they tell other people, so we end up with a large amount of traffic flow through our facility.

#### How did last year's decorating contest go?

It was a pleasant surprise. The theme was "Extreme Makeover: Kennel Edition"—named "Pimp my Pen" by the newspapers. We ended up with a lot of attention from the TV stations as well. The staff enjoyed it—it gives them an opportunity to do something a little unusual. It's administration staff [working] with the frontline staff; it builds morale and gives them the opportunity to know people on a different level. This year, we opened it up to volunteers, so we ended up with [some] volunteer-and-staff teams.

#### What were the staff and volunteers' reactions when you said, "We're bringing it back"?

I think sometimes there's a question of, "We're a little overworked—isn't this going to be too much?" But once they got going into it, there's excitement. Creativity comes out. We ask them to scour everywhere [for supplies], even on the property and in our own basements and everything. We have a big collection of unusual paraphernalia in the shelter. The guidelines are that [the materials] have to be safe, washable, and they have to last two weeks.

#### Do you have a favorite kennel?

I like some of the more simple ones that are more themed. I like the "Road Trip Across America," which has the sign that says "Dog Park 5 Miles Ahead." And it's cute; the dog actually gets inside the toy car, which is hilarious to watch. [In the camping-themed kennel], you'll find the

dog sleeping in the chair and sleeping in the tent. Some of the wild themes, they work because they attract the eye. What we find is that people spend longer here looking at things—not only the animals but looking at the cages. I think the public thinks we're slightly nuts, but that's not a bad thing!

#### Has anybody been chewing or scratching stuff up?

Sometimes things have to be higher up and durable. I can guarantee you that there will be some chewing, and there will be some wear. There's a cage dedicated to Kansas, and it has a "Wizard of Oz" theme, and I think the Wicked Witch of the West's shoes have been eaten. We keep a good eye on it; we don't want them eating shoes. We put our normal enrichment material in there as well. They do pretty good. If the dog is known to be destructive or have anxiety disorders, we probably will have to modify it for that dog's safety.

**Is cleaning more complicated?**

It is! [Normally,] cleaning is very labor-intensive. Every day they go in with a manual hose, and they have to pull everything out, and they have to scrub it down and dry the cage by hand because it is an older facility. Now we have a little bit extra in there they have to work around; they have to pull extra things out. It takes a lot more mechanical time, but it's worth it for two weeks. The public's happy, and the staff's happy, and the dogs are happy—that's what matters.

**What kind of supplies did you buy?**

I'll buy pop-up tents, plastic flowers. I found at the thrift store a painted Egyptian sarcophagus—I think it was from a play—so I was like, "Ooh, a dollar fifty—I have to have that!" We'll buy Chinese lanterns, anything theme-based. Between Target, the thrift stores, the garage sales, and the dollar store, you can really fill out a kennel pretty quick. And you save what you can for the next year.

**Did you participate?**

I did "What Happens in Vegas Stays in Vegas." Some poker-playing dogs and some chips—a "fun in Vegas" type of thing. And Danyelle [Reid, kennel technician] is my decorating partner, and we did a couple cages too. I and a few of the other executive staff sign up, and sometimes the frontline staff doesn't always want to sign up with us. It was nice to see other people sign up with you, and it mixes up the staff.

**How did you publicize this to the community?**

We have our fliers which volunteers distribute, and we have it on our website, which gets 80,000 to 120,000 hits a day. We do press releases; we promote it on TV five or six times a week. Word-of-mouth is pretty important for us. On a given day, between 50 and 100 people come through our [physical] site anyway, so it does get out there. We don't really do any advertising—it's so costly. We will have a banner up at the end of the driveway next year, which I think will grab the traffic. AS

**Why is this cat smiling?**

"...Ahhh..."

**Purr...fect Fence™**  
"Keeping cats happy and safe outdoors."

**(888)280-4066**  
[www.PurrfectFence.com](http://www.PurrfectFence.com)

**Identify Any Size Animal**  
with Precision Dynamics Corporation's  
**Ident-A-Band® Animal ID Collar System**

Now you can easily identify animals of all sizes!  
This animal ID system is conveniently packaged in a continuous roll of vinyl collar material. These collars reduce waste and are ideal for animal care centers that handle a variety of animals.

**The Ident-A-Band Animal ID Collar System includes:**

- 400 foot roll of clear vinyl collars
- 440 white insert cards for recording ID info
- 400 stainless steel clips to securely fasten ID collars
- waterproof pen

*PDC also offers several other Animal ID Band styles in multiple colors for classification.*

**Order the Ident-A-Band Animal ID System Today!**  
Call **800.255.1865** or 818.897.1111  
Online: [www.pdcorp.com/animal-id](http://www.pdcorp.com/animal-id)  
Use promo code **07ASAD** when contacting us.

**pdc**  
Precision Dynamics Corporation