

Off Leash



4 Mimi Surada, event volunteer, holds a pet bowl she decorated at the Fifth Annual FurBall, a Casablanca-themed fundraiser for the Ottawa Humane Society.

5 A blue crème point named Carro won top Household Cat Show.

Putting the 'Fun' in Fundraiser

Shelters rely on wit, imagination, and style to devise successful events in tough times

BY JIM BAKER

What do snowshoes, drag queens and Humphrey Bogart have in common?

They all played an important role in unusual fundraisers that shelters around the country dreamed up this year, helping to keep the dollars rolling (or trickling) in during tough economic times.

Here's a smattering of the wacky and wonderful events shelters have put together to beat those recession blues.

1 Every New Year's Day for the past five years, the Humane Society of Washington County in Hagerstown, Md., has hosted **The Polar Bear Plunge**, during which participants—some in outlandish costumes—pay a \$25 entry fee to take a dip in the icy Potomac River. Most of them last about 30 seconds. Businesses donate money to sponsor the event, which typically grosses \$6,000 to \$7,000.

2 Nearly 150 people turned out Feb. 28 to trek with their dogs around a torchlit snowshoe trail at the Moonlight Basin Ski Resort in Big

Sky, Mont., followed by draft beer, live music, and a chili dinner in the lodge. The fifth annual **Howlin' at the Moon Snowshoe Shuffle** raised about \$10,000 for the Heart of the Valley Animal Shelter in Bozeman.

3 In March, **The Drag Queens of the Metro and the Dogs of Kamp Kritter**, benefitted Kamp Kritter, a shelter for homeless dogs. Performers at the Metro, a local watering hole popular with the gay community of Jacksonville, Fla., donated their time (and their tips), musicians volunteered their services, and the bar owner offered the space at no charge. No dogs in drag attended the show (though they were used in advertising), but plans are in the works to include some canine divas next time. Sue Towler, Kamp Kritter's founder and executive director, said the event raised \$700.

4 More than 370 guests dined, danced, and helped raise \$155,000 at the **FurBall Gala Dinner** for the Ottawa Humane Society in Canada. "Fur" and "Hair" ball fundraisers are nothing new for shelters, but the theme

for this one was the 1942 classic Bogart film *Casablanca*. Volunteers dressed in traditional Moroccan garb, servers wore fezzes, and uniformed and mustachioed French gendarmes rounded up the "usual suspects" for dinner. During the revelry, the film was projected in the great hall of Ottawa's National Gallery, which was decorated with candles and palm trees.

5 The Animal Welfare League of Montgomery County in Gaithersburg, Md., drew 250 to 300 attendees to the **American Feline Idol Benefit Household Cat Show** on April 25. About 40 cats competed—just as they would at a purebred show, being evaluated by judges on multiple factors—and the event grossed about \$9,000. Gaithersburg Mayor Sidney Katz (you can't make this stuff up!) presented the award for the cat with the perfect personality to Rocketman, a black-and-white 22-pounder.

Held any odd fundraisers of your own lately? Tell us about them at asm@humanesociety.org. AS