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Helping our 'best friends'



Photo courtesy of Marla Moran

Marla Moran cuddles with two dogs she called Riff and Raff. She hopes the two canine best friends stay together after adoption.

Many four-legged victims of recent hurricanes still need our help

By Megan Doherty

Trend Leader

As most people spent their Thanksgiving with family and friends, four employees of the Gwynedd Veterinary Hospital were far from home, in Tylertown, Miss. One veterinarian and three veterinary technicians spent a week camping at the St. Francis Animal Sanctuary.

"The amount of help they need in all areas down there is overwhelming," said

Rachel Delconte, one of the veterinary technicians that made the trip. She, along with fellow technicians Marla Moran, Patti DeLange and veterinarian Dr. Laura Kane, spent the week treating numerous animals orphaned or lost in the hurricanes.

"I feel like we made a dent but it would take weeks to get everything accomplished," said Moran.

St. Francis Animal Shelter

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Model trains can deliver big fun

By Megan Doherty

Trend Leader

With all the spinning, singing and flashing ornaments that have become a part of the holidays, some might have forgotten decorations of the past. Once, a little train was the most technological decoration.

A recent exhibit of Kulpsville's Keystone N-Trak, a model train club, brought out many who had

not forgotten the fun model trains can bring. Some small ones discovered, for the first time, the fun of model trains.

Keystone N-trak most recently displayed their miniature trains and towns at the Schwenkfelder Library and Heritage Center in Pennsburg.

"These kind of activities we do as a part of our mission to be a cul-



Photo by Megan Doherty/ Trend Leader

Many children exploring the miniature trains and towns.

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Helping our 'best friends' after the hurricanes

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houses around 200 dogs and around the same number of cats. Over 1,300 dogs have moved through the shelter since Hurricane Katrina.

"Some are sick and injured animals, some they just picked up as they were cleaning out the towns," said Delconte.

During their week at the St. Francis Animal Sanctuary, the team from Gwynedd Veterinary Hospital cared for the sick animals, spayed and neutered the feral cats and stray dogs and checked new arrivals for any problems.

"A lot of them were pretty stable. They were thin and hungry," said Moran.

After providing food and shelter for the animals, the volunteers at St. Francis Animal Sanctuary provided some friendship to the animals.

"A decent amount of them are feral and, in order to be adopted out, they need to be socialized," said Moran.

An animal society from Utah, the Best Friends Animal Society, working at the St. Francis Animal Sanctuary, has brought in some volunteers to help socialize the animals. Just spending time with a cat or dog can help the animal's odds of becoming someone's pet.

The ultimate goal is to reunite as many pets with their original owners, if at all possible. Until then, the animal shelter is looking for foster homes to

take in the animals.

"It's great to have foster homes, but they need to be reunited with their owners," said Delconte.

The Best Friends Animal Society and the St. Francis Animal Sanctuary utilize the Internet to try and find owners of the cats and dogs. On PetFinder.com, people who lost pets in the hurricane can search a special section devoted just to the pets lost in recent natural disasters.

In the week that Moran and Delconte were in Mississippi, there was one couple who came to the animal sanctuary to pick up two dogs they had lost. Another reunion, which struck Moran as touching, involved no humans at all. Two young dogs, which she referred to as Riff and Raff, became so excited to see each other in the shelter that Moran concluded they must have been together before the meeting.

"It was so cute, but difficult to see," said Moran. The two dogs looked very similar and could possibly even have been from the same litter, but that can not be known for sure. Moran hopes the two friendly dogs are able to stay together even if they are adopted.

Most of the other animals that left the sanctuary went to foster homes. The veterinary technicians said it was an emotional experience, to see so many animals in need, but they had fun as well.

Because many volunteers were able to come down during the holiday week, the Gwynedd Veterinary Hospital team camped at the site. They also camped out because the nearest town with a hotel is about 20 miles away, said Moran. Other volunteers, and some animals, were housed in yurts. A yurt is a large tent with a wooden floor and insulated tarp walls.

Moran said that the animal sanctuary needed, and still needs, all sorts of volunteers. While the volunteers with veterinary experience served the animals directly, other volunteers also served them.

One teenage boy and his mother came to the animal sanctuary and did nothing but work in the kitchen all week, Moran said. With the veterinarians and vet techs working long hours, having meals cooked made life a lot easier. Another big help to the volunteers was the "Zero Dollar Store," where past volunteers left supplies that might help out the next group.

The St. Francis Animal Sanctuary had many other cute names the makeshift shelters that were put up. All animals were checked in at "Ellis Island." The animals were checked for identification and health issues. They would then be photographed and listed on PetFinder.com.

The dogs were housed according to size: the big dogs went to "The Heights"



Photo courtesy of Marla Moran

A dog receives treatment after reaching the shelter in Tylerstown, Miss.

the small dogs went to "Toy Land" and the mid-sized dogs stayed in "The Tweens." Dogs with a knack for escaping the average pens were put in the more secure "Houdini House." The cats lived in "Kitty City."

Both Moran and Delconte plan to return to Tylertown to help more pets in need. Best Friends Animal Society, which informed them about the need for volunteers, had hoped to pull out in December. That will not be happening, there are still many animals in need of help. The vet techs hope to take more volunteers with them because the need is so great.

"They are going to be there until they have found homes for all the animals," said Delconte. If you would like to help or donate contact the Gwynedd Veterinary Hospital at 215-699-9294.

Model trains can deliver big fun for holidays

From TRAINS on page 1

tural center for the area," said Candace Perry, the exhibits curator of the Schwenkfelder Library and Heritage Center. The main purpose of the heritage center is to preserve the history of the Schwenkfelders. The Schwenkfelders are a German protestant group that sought refuge in Pennsylvania in the 18th century.

While model trains might not fit directly into the Schwenkfelder history, the train exhibit brought some holiday cheer to the heritage center. Perry said that the museum often has more light-hearted exhibits around the holidays, things that children might enjoy.

Parents and grandparents brought their children to the Keystone N-Trak, Buxmont Route, to examine the tiny world that had been created. Children peered into the windows of the passen-

ger train as lights inside flickered to reveal some very tiny commuters. The trains passed through a number of scenes, including a town, rural farms, factories and headed to the docks.

"Everything is based on real railroad practices," said Keystone N-Trak member Joe Palenchar. He added that no actual places are recreated in the scenes the group assembles. Likewise, there is not particular period of time depicted, though modern cars, telephone poles and factories were depicted.

The Keystone N-Trak Buxmont Route follows the international N-Trak standards.

"This allows for, when you have a national or international convention, running really long tracks that might take two hours for a train to run around," said Palenchar.

Palenchar, who has been involved with model trains for about 18 years and has

been a member of Keystone N-Trak Buxmont Route for many years. He and the other members of the model train club travel the Mid-Atlantic states to display their trains at train shows and conventions. Locally, the Keystone N-Trak Buxmont Route can be found at the Kulpville antique market on Forty Foot Road. The club will hold a free open house on weekends in January.

In addition to the model trains there were many other miniatures on display at the Schwenkfelder Library and Heritage Center. The other miniatures were not a part of the train exhibit. For example, a Christmas Putz, a tradition of German Americans, is currently on display.

"The Putz is a German tradition that is very local," said Perry. Putz is a German word meaning "to decorate," Perry said.

The Christmas Putz, she said, most often was a miniature depiction of rural

life. Occasionally a nativity scene would accompany the Putz in local homes. The Putz on display does not include a nativity scene, but it does show many daily scenes of farm life before gasoline-powered equipment was used on farms. The Christmas Putz was very popular in the early 20th century.

"A lot of the animals date to the 1920s and were imported from Germany," Perry said of the heritage center's display. Other miniature scenes showcase a Victorian Christmas and other snapshots of the past.

"Exhibits generally show the history of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania German population," said Perry.

To find out about future exhibits at the Schwenkfelder Library and Heritage Center visit www.Schwenkfelder.com. To learn more about Keystone N-Trak Buxmont Route displays visit www.keystonetrak.us.