

## New programs at Humane Society Silicon Valley

by Shannon Barry, Milpitas Post

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Michelle Wise, an animal care technician, and Frank Guzman, supervisor of animal care, load new donations for the recently formed Pat Pantry program at Humane Society Silicon Valley. (Photo by Kvm Fortino)

A growing number of pets are being left in the cold quite literally as owners throughout the country continue facing job losses and home foreclosures.

With little money left in their pocket to fend for themselves and their families, let alone the basic needs of their longtime companions, some people are forced to abandon their furry friends however reluctantly to the hands of local animal shelters.

Staff from Humane Society Silicon Valley are working to combat this problem on a local level

through the recently launched Pet Pantry Donation Program, which provides food to those guardians who cannot afford to feed their pets.

Sue Burbank is a customer care associate who mans the calls of the surrender facility on a daily basis. She began noticing more frequent, desperate inquiries last June from people seeking to surrender their pets to the facility.

"It is common to hear people can't afford to take care of their children and pets at the same time" on a daily basis, she said. Burbank said such calls primarily revolve around dogs and cats rather than pocket pets like rabbits or rats.

So rather than separate those animals and owners who have become bonded over the years, Mike Foltz, manager of animal care, and a small team of other associates came up with a plan to begin collecting food with the sole purpose of distributing it to those inquiring for such help.

"The biggest benefit is to plug in where there is a need," Foltz said.

Since the program's inception Foltz said they have received donations largely from private parties but also through corporations and animal supply stores. They have received large donations through the organized efforts of nearby schools and organizations like Division 6 of the California Retired Teachers' Association who recently contributed 43 pounds of dry cat food, 46 pounds of dry dog food, 46 cans or pouches of wet cat food and dog treats in addition to other items.

"Donations come from all over the place," Foltz said. "I am amazed at the donations."

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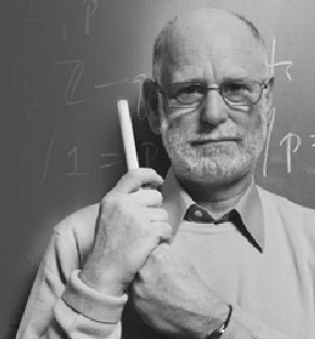


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He added the need for such donations is equally split between dog and cat food.

Eight different families have benefit from Pet Pantry so far; all identified by going through surrender questionnaires with customer care associates at the Humane Society.

Laura Fulda, vice president of marketing and communications for Humane Society, said the questionnaire is detailed "because we try and get to the root of the problems."

Once it is discovered owners don't want to bring their animals in but are struggling to pay the cost of food under dire circumstances, they are asked if they want to receive items through the program.

The pantry attracts clients from all walks of life, Foltz said, including those recently down on their luck, homeless people and volunteers for rescue organizations whose "hearts are sometimes bigger than their budget."

Recently a woman contacted the shelter because she lost her job, her husband's work hours had been cut in half and they have a 100-pound chocolate Lab.

Feeding a large animal takes an average of four and a half to five cups a day, Foltz said, with such intake quickly going through many bags and creating a steep bill of \$260 a month for food alone.

Within a short period of time the lady was confronted with the question: "Do I have enough money?"

After talking with Foltz about her issue on the phone, he told her to come in to pick up food. She

arrived 30 minutes later, grateful for the support.

One of the pantry's first clients was a transient Foltz saw walking with two medium-sized dogs on a nearby Milpitas overpass. With a seven-pound bag of dog food in his car, Foltz stopped, offered it to the man and took his name and telephone number for future support.

When asked of the outreach the program has provided so far, Foltz said: "So far, so good." He hopes it expands in the future to allow staff members the chance to spend part of their day in the community delivering food, allowing for important face-to-face interaction between the clients.

"Our mission is to save and enhance lives, not just by adopting," Fulda said. "No more are we a small, scary shelter. We offer new, exciting ways to be a part of the solution."

The program is always seeking more donations including dry and canned foods as well as treats. They ask for sealed bags of dry dog food or else it will spoil quickly. Open bags of dry cat food are OK.

For those individuals or corporations interested in contributing, clearly mark the package "Pet Pantry," fill out an online donation form at [www.hssv.org/donate\\_petpantry.html](http://www.hssv.org/donate_petpantry.html) and staff will contact you within 24 hours. Animal supply stores that have returned, expired, torn or otherwise unsellable bags of dog or cat food can call the pantry's hotline at 262-2133, extension 393 to request a pickup. Receipts are available for tax purposes.

## PUP program

In another effort to take a proactive approach to

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# The Mercury News

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decrease animal issues of growing concern, Humane Society Silicon Valley launched its PUP (Prevent Unwanted Pregnancies) program at the end of February.

Contact Shannon Barry at [sbarry@themilpitaspost.com](mailto:sbarry@themilpitaspost.com) or 408-262-2454

This program was created in an effort to help control the pet over-population problem facing Santa Clara County, serving as a resource for owners whose dogs have had a litter and are unable to find good homes for the puppies.

According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, only 10 percent of animals received by shelters like the Humane Society have been spayed or neutered.

As part of the program, pet owners can bring their unwanted litters in, surrender them at no charge and arrange for the parents of the litters to be spayed and neutered for free through the medical center. Owners don't have to worry about the financial burden of feeding and providing initial veterinary care for the puppies and they also know staff will adopt the puppies out to a home able to properly care for them.

Humane Society staff emphasize the benefits of creating the program were two-fold. Not only do the owners benefit but so too do the organization and community at large.

The average number of litters a fertile dog produces is one a year with an average of four to six puppies, according to ASPCA. The organization adds that five out of 10 dogs in shelters are destroyed simply because there is no one to adopt them.

For more information about these programs or more, visit [www.hssv.org](http://www.hssv.org) or call 262-2133.

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