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## Volunteers help Sandy's four-legged victims recover

Created on Wednesday, 02 January 2013 03:00 | Written by [Raymond Rendleman](#) |



by: COURTESY: OREGON HUMANE SOCIETY - Oregon Humane Society employee Emily Davidshon is shown volunteering at the Brooklyn shelter in December.

it can only provide free food, shelter and veterinary care for 30 days.

Volunteers often wore a head-to-toe protective suits to care for pets kept under quarantine conditions for medical reasons. People with pets at the shelter often lived in temporary housing funded by the federal government that didn't allow pets, or were unemployed and couldn't afford to care for their animals.

Neitch witnessed a man who traveled two hours every day to visit his dog staying at the shelter even though he lost his home and business due to the storm. An elderly woman who was made homeless by the storm would visit her aging, half-blind Chihuahua at the shelter.

"She cries the entire time and feeds him snacks through the bars of the kennel," Neitch recalled. "She doesn't know if she'll ever be able to take him home, because right now she hasn't one."

Neitch, 47, added it was nice to see some happy families reunite with their pets while she was in NYC, leaving less than 100 animals to find homes before the shelter closes Jan. 15. Locally, she also shares with students her African savanna monitor and South American green iguana that she rescued as part of the humane society's emergency-response team.

"Call it my 'catharsis' if you will, away from the stress of dealing with police-related human problems," she said. "The media on our side of the country has gone onto new news topics, yet the Sandy super-storm is still causing misery for thousands of people. Would you believe that after two months, there are still large areas without power?"

Milwaukie Police Officer Ulli Neitch and Oregon City resident Jo Becker were among a team of three Oregon Humane Society volunteers who returned home last week after seven grueling days helping at a massive emergency shelter for pets left homeless in the wake of Hurricane Sandy.

Traveling farthest to help out, the Oregon group worked nonstop at the 20,000-square-foot emergency boarding center that opened Nov. 18 in a vacant Brooklyn warehouse to house hundreds of cats and dogs whose owners no longer have homes. Since the dogs have to remain quarantined in small kennels, volunteers have to clean the cages several times a day.

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals also runs the shelter as an overflow valve for local animal shelters overwhelmed by the storm. The shelter only has space for 700 animals, so



by: SUBMITTED - Officer Ulli Neitch



by: SUBMITTED PHOTO - Oregon City resident Jo Becker helps out at an emergency shelter in New York City where Milwaukie Police Officer Ulli Neitch also cared for homeless cats and dogs.

That said, police activity often interrupted Neitch's time at the Brooklyn facility where armed security were stationed outside the doors to keep stuff from getting stolen.

"Police on calls everywhere — baseball-bat fighting teens on the sidewalk, someone jumping off the elevated train tracks one block away ... quite the experience," Neitch said.

#### Worthwhile experience

Neitch said she had absolutely no time to sight-see between waking up every day, driving to the shelter, working "like a dog" and going to back to the hotel to crash. The other volunteer was Karin Maczko of Southeast Portland.

"I'm incredibly impressed that these volunteers spent the holiday season helping animals," said OHS Executive Director Sharon Harmon. "They did a tough job and did it with compassion."

Several of the out-of-town volunteers were put up in a couple hotels side-by-side in Queens. On Saturday and Sunday the drive took 15 minutes, but during the week it had taken 45 minutes to an hour, adding to what were on average 10-hour days.

Becker, 38, noted "it was all very much worth it" to be able to work with the animals and be of assistance. She was glad to spend time in two different wards—first with the general population of cats and then in the isolation ward with 11 dogs.

"It really impressed folks we'd come so far to help out but we were happy to do it," Becker said. "It was amazing to work alongside 35 to 40 people, all singularly intent on the mission and eager and willing to give 110 percent. Personalities, politics, culture, class, etc. didn't—as far as I could see—matter to anyone. We were all there for a common goal and united by that which was most important: the four-legged critters in our care. What an experience! That said, boy, it's good to be back home in Oregon City!"



by: SUBMITTED - Jo Becker

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