

CURRENTS

Do humans need nature?

What does nature do for you, especially during these trying times? Please e-mail Sheryl De Vore at devore@pioneerlocal.com or call (847) 486-7359 and share your stories of enjoying nature and why it's important in your life.

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Susie Griffith shares a moment with her dog, Wrigley, on the roof of her home in Chicago. See their story on the following page.
— Jason Han/Staff Photographer

SAVED Lost pets of Hurricane Katrina find homes in Chicago, suburbs

Pootsy is one of the lucky dogs who was able to leave New Orleans with her owner Katrina Daniels a day before Hurricane Katrina made landfall a year ago in August.

But, when the pair got to Chicago, dog and owner were separated for three months because Daniels had trouble finding a place to live that would also take the poodle.

The Anti-Cruelty Society agreed to house Pootsy until Daniels found a dog-friendly home.

But there are thousands of pets who lost their homes and were detached, some forever, from their human companions.

HURRICANE KATRINA

ONE YEAR LATER

Refugee camps for the homeless pets sprang up all over Louisiana and Mississippi shortly after Hurricane Katrina pounded the Gulf Coast.

Animal welfare organizations from Illinois, including the Anti-

Cruelty Society, Pets Are Worth Saving (PAWS) of Chicago and Save-A-Pet in Grayslake, answered the call to help find new homes for the displaced pets.

Many animal-lovers in Chicago and the suburbs also answered the call by adopting the Katrina pets. Some of the pets and their new companions are featured here.

The pet owners were spurred into action by the images of pets standing stranded on porches of homes surrounded by flood waters or wandering through deserted streets.

The scene was worse in person.

Alexis Fasseas, volunteer and daughter of PAWS founder Paula Fasseas, traveled to an Arkansas shelter that was taking in four-legged Katrina refugees. PAWS took 204 animals off their hands.



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The hurricane's destruction left a lasting impact on humans and nonhumans alike.

"The stench was beyond belief because of the flood waters," she said. It took at least 10 baths to get the smell off some animals.

"They had ticks as big as grapes," she said of the homeless animals.

Kevin Morrissey, director of communications for PAWS, said all the animals they took in were placed in new homes from the organization's Lurie Family Spay/Neuter Clinic and through adoption events held in the city and suburbs.

He said an unusually high amount, 20 percent, of the animals brought back had heartworm, a parasitic worm transmitted by fleas and mosquitoes that feeds off the bloodstream, especially the heart.

"There were a lot of problems with heartworm," he said.

Although he did not witness any emotional problems in the animals, he heard many stories of homeless pets bonding immediately with their rescuers and new families. He's also heard a lot of stories about pets being afraid of rainstorms and going into water.

Nadine Walmsley, vice president of development for the Anti-Cruelty Society, said only one cat died out of the more than 100 animals her organization took in.

The cat died from exposure to toxins in the hurricane ravaged area.

Walmsley said half the cat was fur-less and covered in sore patches.

"It was really bad," she said. "The vets tried everything, but it was a situation that couldn't be helped."

Walmsley said the Anti-Cruelty Society bought two vans to assist the Louisiana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals collect the homeless pets.

And PAWS, Morrissey said, will go back to areas affected by Katrina to bring back more animals because the strays are having offspring. PAWS will also help local veterinarians set up spay and neuter clinics, he said.

STORIES BY J.T. MORAND | STAFF WRITER