



A GIVING NETWORK



Trinket DeBord of LowRider Dachshund Rescue, Lajeana Walker of Fetch Inc., and rescue dogs Taylor and Bunny help distribute Pedigree food.

Rescue Bank's food-donation program distributes essential nutrition for homeless pets, freeing up funds so groups can provide critical veterinary care.

By Meredith Wargo

Molly and her six German Shepherd-mix puppies were found living in a brush pile on a farmer's field in rural Alabama. Molly was emaciated and suffering from a gaping flesh wound when she was rescued by the Jackson County SPCA in Pisgah, Ala.

After an initial visit to the veterinarian, Molly was placed on antibiotics and treated with wound spray, but the extent of damage to her leg couldn't be determined at the time. Molly later went back for X-rays and it was discovered that her leg was riddled with birdshot from a close-range shotgun blast. After weeks of additional treatment, Molly completely healed and is now awaiting her forever home.

Rescue Bank volunteers gather to transport high-quality food to shelters.



Jeni Jamison from Legacy of Hope Rescue shows Domino that he gets his own bag of Nutro.

"At one time, X-rays were a luxury we could rarely afford," says Laurie Shaw, director of the Jackson County SPCA. "Our relationship with Rescue Bank has impacted our shelter beyond just feeding homeless pets. We are saving more animals like Molly because our monetary donations can be used for vaccines, medicine and veterinary services instead of (just) purchasing pet food."

A proven model

The Rescue Bank is a nonprofit pet-food pantry that applies the human food-bank model to serve the everyday needs of animal rescue and adoption groups. Since its founding in Houston in 2006, Rescue Bank has delivered more than 75 million meals to homeless pets across the country.

Modeled after Feeding America, which is the



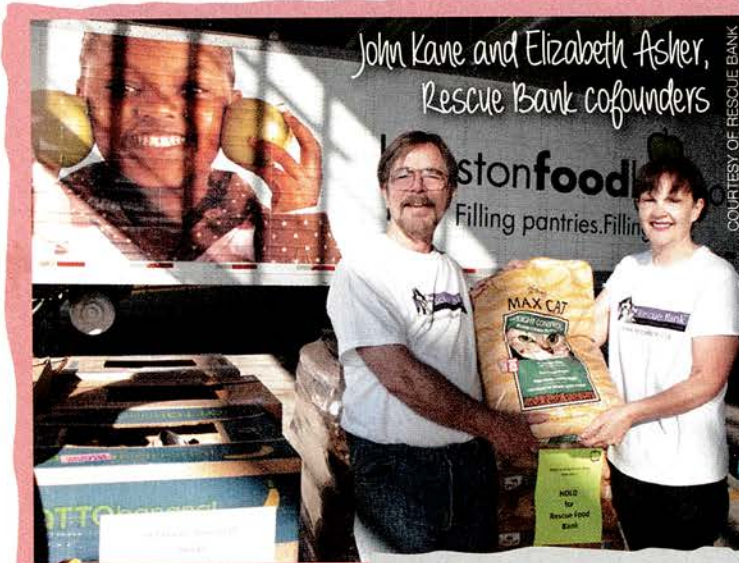
GET WITH THE PROGRAM

Pet rescue organizations with 501(c)(3) registered status are encouraged to enroll in Rescue Bank's national pet food distribution program. Groups must also meet certain guidelines set by Rescue Bank based on the organization type. These standards, which are defined on Rescue Bank's website, vary depending if the organization is an animal shelter, rescue group, animal sanctuary or feral cat-related organization.

Applications are available online at www.rescuebank.org. Once approved, qualified groups will be notified by their regional affiliate about upcoming distribution events. Recipients are responsible for picking up their food, as well as paying a nominal shipping fee.

Donations benefit groups like Pet Food Pantry, which helps the elderly and homeless feed their pets.

umbrella organization for human food banks in the United States, Rescue Bank serves as a collection and redistribution point for pet food, treats, cat litter and other supplies.



John Kane and Elizabeth Asher,
Rescue Bank cofounders

COURTESY OF RESCUE BANK

THE CAT'S MEOW

Spay It Forward, NFP (not for profit) in Seneca, Ill., was founded in 2009 to minimize the overpopulation of homeless animals in LaSalle County. Spay It Forward provides food for nearly 300 feral cats living in five large, managed colonies in the area. The nonprofit organization also provides trap-neuter-return services and transports any sick or injured cat living in the colonies to local vets for medical treatment.

"We predominantly get canned cat food from Rescue Bank, which has been a godsend," says Jennifer Bilyeu, president of Spay It Forward. "In the winter, a lot of the cats are sick with respiratory issues. The wet food gives the cats extra calories and enables us to mass medicate the food, which minimizes the spread of illness. And when the weather is exceptionally cold, we heat up the cans so the cats having something warm to eat."

On distribution days, Spay It Forward volunteers travel 85 miles one way to their affiliate, which is located in Barrington Hills, Ill. The money they save from not having to purchase cat food on a regular basis is used for spays and neuters. On average, Spay It Forward sponsors 300 to 400 surgeries each year.

"There's no way we could afford the canned food on our own," Bilyeu says. "We're extremely grateful to be part of Rescue Bank's food distribution program because it has sustained so many lives."

"By partnering with national pet food manufacturers, distributors and retailers, we provide quality food to the animal rescue community, freeing them from one of their most expensive costs," says Elizabeth Asher, executive director and cofounder of Rescue Bank.

Every year, millions of pounds of nutritious pet food end up in local landfills because the food is nearing its expiration date, was packaged incorrectly or is discontinued. Manufacturers would prefer to donate the food to animal-welfare organizations, but many companies lack the resources to form relationships and handle the logistics with them.

"Manufacturers want to know their food is benefiting groups with proven records of helping animals in their communities," says John Kane, development director and cofounder of Rescue Bank. "That's where we come in. We have systems in place that provide tracking services and logistics, enabling pet food companies to track the impact of their donations."

Rescue Bank has a nationwide coalition of 30 regional affiliates across the country. These groups



Edy Bauer from Pets and People Humane Society, OK, a Rescue Bank affiliate, holds Jet, a puppy who was rescued after his leg was broken by softball-sized hail.

COURTESY OF PETS & PEOPLE HUMANE SOCIETY, OK

play a vital role in equitably distributing donated pet food and supplies to approximately 1,500 pre-approved rescue charities nationwide. Two years ago, Pets & People Humane Society in Yukon, Okla., became one of Rescue Bank's affiliates.

"We have about 35 groups in Oklahoma that receive food through Rescue Bank's program," says Edy Bauer, food distribution coordinator for Pets & People Humane Society. The bank's recipients are spread out across the state with some groups traveling only 20 minutes to pick up their food. Others drive more than two hours.

"Rescue Bank has been instrumental in bringing everybody together," Bauer says. "Because we are busy focusing on our own rescue efforts, we don't have time to get to know the other groups. Seeing each other at the distribution events allows us to network with our fellow rescuers."

Quality nutrition, minimal cost

In 2011, Rescue Bank became a charity partner on The Animal Rescue Site, which is operated by GreaterGood. Visitors to The Animal Rescue Site can click on the "Click here — it's FREE" button every day to generate a donation to Rescue Bank.

"Our partnership with GreaterGood and The Animal Rescue Site supplements our freight costs, which allows us to establish a uniform handling fee across the country," Kane says. "While the food is free, the cost to transport it is not. We calculate our average freight costs and charge the same fees to everyone, regardless if the group is in Boise, Idaho, or Dallas."



Volunteers load bags of kibble for delivery.

ON AVERAGE, RESCUE GROUPS PAY ABOUT \$60 FOR A PALLET OF FOOD, WHICH — DEPENDING ON THE BRAND — CAN RANGE IN VALUE FROM \$800 TO \$5,000. "THIS SYSTEM ENABLES THE RECIPIENTS TO PAY A FRACTION OF THE COST FOR THE QUALITY OF FOOD THEY'RE RECEIVING AND APPLY THE SAVINGS TO OTHER ESSENTIALS, LIKE SPAY/NEUTER AND VETERINARY SERVICES," ASHER SAYS.

The exception is when disasters occur. Rescue Bank provides relief supplies free to groups impacted by tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, fires and explosions. "Due to our relationships with several manufacturers, we're able to arrange for special deliveries in times of need," Asher says.

In addition to weather-related and man-made emergencies, Rescue Bank affiliates have also responded to large- and small-scale abuse, neglect, hoarding and puppy mill seizures by providing food to the lead responding agencies.

Priceless benefits

Because many rescue organizations are on tight budgets, they often struggle with making choices between veterinary services and food. "Rescues are where the hard work is done," Asher says. "We understand what high-quality food means to these groups and what it can do for each rescued pet."

The recipients of the food might not know in advance what kind of food they will be getting, but the distribution events are special, nonetheless. "The joy begins when we get notification that we're getting a shipment of food," Shaw says. "Back at our shelter, we unload the food by hand. For as much work as it is, I've never seen happier people." ©RM

Meredith Wargo is an award-winning freelance writer in Houston.

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