



SHELTER FROM THE STORM:

Kirkwood Campus is Haven to Hundreds of Eastern Iowa Pets

*by Kathy Kaiser, Kirkwood News Service
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During a disastrous flood that seemed to be of Biblical proportions, it might be fitting to have a collection of animals resembling Noah's Ark.

A dedicated team at Kirkwood Community College has taken in hundreds of pets rescued from the record flooding in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The Iowa Equestrian Center on the college campus has been transformed into an emergency animal shelter to assist the Cedar Rapids city facility overwhelmed by the flooding situations of mid-June 2008.

Along with the hundreds of cats and dogs in the Kirkwood flood shelter you will see geckos, a green lizard, an iguana, a rabbit, a macaw, birds of all sizes and a cage full of rats.

There are some local 'celebrities,' too: The dog rescued from a roof by firefighters, Sam the cat featured in the local newspaper. Others have stories that may never be told until and unless they are reunited with their human companions.

As the more than 370 animals arrived, they were evaluated by one of three teams consisting of a veterinarian, a vet technician and vet assistant. Kirkwood Animal Health Professor Anne Duffy estimates 85 percent have owners. The others have been separated from their families, were from the animal shelter or simply strays.

Some animals arrived with their families, who lost everything and were heading for one of the local shelters set up in school gymnasiums and churches. After losing everything they owned in the floods, it was difficult to also leave their pets.

About 50 animals arrived on Saturday, June 14. Duffy said 15 were cats pulled out of the water by firefighters or police.

The animals usually arrive in stressed conditions. To relieve a group of birds, Duffy had music playing in the background. In a strained night for animals and humans alike,

that brought an unexpected moment of levity.

"One bird recognized a song... and began to sing along," Duffy said.

In another room, a stray pit bull arrived just in time to deliver eight puppies.

After a physical examination, the animals get vaccinated, then logged into a database noting species, breed, description, and where they were found. If known, the owner information is added to the record. Caring for immediate needs such as injuries, dehydration and hunger are next, then it's on to labeled cages and the waiting begins.

The large open area is usually home to large-format horse shows and other events. Now it is a giant pet apartment complex. Volunteers walk dogs two times daily.

Duffy said more than 300 people have volunteered. One man arrived with his eight year-old to help. Volunteers must be 18 or older to work with the animals, so the pair spent the day washing food dishes and doing laundry.

When asked how long he'd been there, Kirkwood Grounds Supervisor and volunteer Mike Martin asked, "What day is this?"

Martin shared a story about one dog that had its head flat on the floor and looked depressed. Later, the dog was reunited with his owner and left prancing. Martin noted the owner was crying for joy.

Duffy praised Martin and other volunteers who make the daunting tasks possible.

"The volunteers are angels. People have been outstanding. They have given their time and talent to make all this happen," she said.

Others are giving financial resources, too. Duffy noted one man who walked in with a check for \$500 to help. She said the biggest need for the Kirkwood emergency shelter is for contributions, because the animal needs are changing.

"[Sunday's] rescues were more dehydrated, and we have no idea how many

animals will arrive next. Contributions can be made at the Diamond V building or sent to the Kirkwood Foundation," Duffy said.

She also notes assistance from the Linn County Veterinarians, the Iowa Veterinarians Medical Association and the Eastern Iowa Veterinarians Association has made a tremendous difference.

Duffy said the need for financial assistance and volunteers will continue in the foreseeable future. "These animals will need continued care. Some of their families have lost everything, so it will be a long time before they reunite with their pets. Other animals will continue to need care until they find a home."



Top left: A beautiful Great Dane was one of the animals housed temporarily.

Top Right: A volunteer plays with one of the dogs.

Bottom: Dog Walkers (volunteers) prepare to exercise their charges.

