

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

On the Positive Side

Calendar project brings art, businesses together to benefit animal shelter

By Kathy Lawitz For the Sun-News

Posted: 12/20/2009 12:00:00 AM MST

Looking for last-minute gifts that will make a difference to local animals? Pick up "For the Sake of Animals" 2010 calendars and notecards.

These products are the culmination of an effort among local artists, volunteers and the business community to help raise funds for long-term, much-needed projects for the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley.

"For the Sake of Animals" began when artist Virginia Maria Romero donated the use of her artwork, "Outcasts" to the shelter for fund-raising purposes.

"Initially I was asked (by Dr. Beth Vesco-Mock) to paint what I saw there for use as a logo," Romero said. "After a walk-through of the shelter, I realized and expressed to Dr. Beth that I had already painted what I witnessed there; 'Outcasts.' I wanted to do more to help the animals so donated the use of my 'Outcasts' artwork to help bring awareness to the shelter and be used for fund-raising that would directly benefit the ASCMV where the animals are housed and cared for."

Dr. Vesco-Mock seized on the image as the shelter's logo and turned to her volunteers to brainstorm for a revenue-producing idea for the image.

Two volunteers - Jake Sims of Jake Sims & Co. Realty and this writer, took the resulting idea - to find a printer who would make "Outcasts" posters at no cost or for a reduced fee, and to make the posters available for sale to the public at the shelter - and made it our mission, operating cooperatively but independently from the shelter. It was decided to expand the idea into a fund with far-reaching goals that will help fill the monetary and public awareness gaps that currently plague the shelter. The movement, "For the Sake of Animals," was born.

"We wanted to be able to move quickly on this," Sims said. "That's tough to do if you're going through government channels."

The poster idea expanded when artist and Del Valle Printing owner Jud Wright proposed expanding the project to not only a poster, but a 2010 calendar and notecards as well, to widen the range of artists, community involvement and appeal.

With Del Valle signed on for printing and Sims' real estate company underwriting costs, a call went out to the local art community for images to be considered for the project. The response was tremendous, and a committee of volunteers and Dr. Vesco-Mock had to pare the submissions down to 12 for the calendar and eight for notecards.

Sims, who is also a member of the shelter's strategic planning committee, set up the "For the Sake of Animals" account at Bank of the Rio Grande to hold funds generated from anticipated sales.

"The idea is to have a pool of money readily available for whatever is needed at the shelter," Sims said. "One hundred percent of the money will directly benefit the shelter."

Goals for the proceeds include a public awareness campaign and a signature fund-raiser.

"We'd like to see a marketing strategy promoting shelter adoptions and urging the community to have their pets spayed and neutered," Sims said. "This is something that proactive governments to the north and south of us recognize as a necessity and fund accordingly; ours has not evolved to that level."

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"Also, the shelter doesn't have a major annual fundraiser like other local organizations and charities. It takes money, and there isn't anything in the shelter's budget for that," Sims said. "What we raise through the sale of calendars, notecards and posters can be the start of a pool that we can use to stage the shelter's first major fundraiser."

Printing was completed in early November. The calendars feature a different artist for each month of the year, and the notecards - eight different sets - are four to a package.

Calendars, notecard sets and posters are \$10 each and available at the following Las Cruces locations:

- Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley, 3551 Bataan Memorial West (calendars, notecards and posters)
- Better Life Pet Foods, 365 Avenida de Mesilla (calendars only)
- Blue Gate Gallery, 3011 N. Downtown Mall (calendars and notecards)
- Downtown Farmers Market dog adoption site (Saturday mornings, calendars and notecards)
- Horse 'n Hound, 991 W. Amador Ave. (calendars only)
- Safe Haven Thrift Store (calendars and notecards)

Calendars and notecards are also available by mail. Send check or money order to: For the Sake of Animals, 2292 Divot Ave., Las Cruces, NM 88001. For more information, call (575) 521-6001 or (575) 642-2648.

Also, high-quality, board-mounted giclee prints of "Outcasts" are available for \$60 each at the Alameda House, 526 S. Alameda Blvd., (575) 523-8570.

Kathy Lawitz is a jewelry artist and former L.A. Times journalist. She co-chaired the first two "For the HeART of Animals" events in Las Cruces.