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White Plains woman setting up county's first food pantry for pets

By Richard Liebson • rliebson@lohud.com • February 8, 2011

Susan Katz likes cats. Also, dogs, rabbits, hamsters and pretty much any other kind of pet you can name.

The White Plains resident and founder of the Westco Productions family theater group likes pets so much that when she retired from her job as officer manager of the White Plains Traffic Department in 2009, she decided to do something to help animals and their owners.

"I was watching a story on the news about how the bad economy was putting strain on pet owners and how so many pets were being abandoned or dropped off at shelters because people could no longer afford to keep them," she said. "That really stuck with me. I started doing some research and found out that there was no pet food pantry in Westchester. Some humane societies and pet shelters have a little bit of food available, but there was nothing dedicated strictly as a food bank for pets."

Soon, there will be.

The newly formed Hudson Valley Food Pantry is set to open in April in space donated by American Legion Post 1038 at its 27 Legion Drive building in Valhalla. The non-profit organization plans to make free pet food available to individuals and families who can demonstrate a need. Potential clients will have to fill out an application that includes income information that will be used to determine whether they're eligible.

"We're talking about people who may have lost their job, or are senior citizens on a fixed income, or people who face other temporary or permanent financial hardships," Katz said.

"We're hoping that by providing them with pet food, they'll be able to keep their pets," she said.

Katz said the pantry would be open to residents of Westchester, Rockland, Putnam and Dutchess counties, and that the long-term goal is to open a separate pantry for pets in each county. She said the pantry would be staffed by volunteers and would be open from noon to 4 p.m. Wednesdays and Saturdays. Arrangements can be made for pet food to be delivered to owners who are homebound.

"It's really a great idea," said Sarah Hart, president of the Ardsley-based Cats Assistance shelter.

"We get a lot of calls from people who are forced to give up their animals because they can no longer afford to feed them," Hart said. "I have volunteers who are feeding animals out of their own pockets. This being set up solely to provide food for pet owners will be a great help to the other animal organizations in the area."

Although Katz doesn't know how many clients to expect, a year-old pet food pantry that is one of the animal services run by the Hudson Valley Humane Society in Rockland County is feeding 200 animals.

For the past year, some 200 Rockland dogs and cats have been fed, thanks to the efforts of the Hudson Valley Humane Society's Pet Food Pantry in Pomona.

Society trustee Ann Marie Gaudio said those seeking help include owners who lost their jobs and owners living on fixed incomes.

"We have a lot of veterans who come," Gaudio said. "We have seniors, people who live in (affordable) housing, single moms with kids. You name it. Every walk of life. People who are pretty well educated, but they just can't find a job. People on fixed incomes."

The Hudson Valley Food Pantry is seeking donations of pet food, which can be left in a specially marked drop-off bin at the Petco store at 324 N. Central Ave. in Hartsdale.

Katz said she's also looking for volunteers with a variety of skills, as well as applicants who need help providing their pets with food.

For more information, visit the pantry's website at www.hvpetfoodpantry.org or call 914-907-3487.



Susan Katz, left, of White Plains is starting a food pantry for pets, to help people hurt by the economy keep their pets by giving them free pet food. With Katz is Kathy Ferri, director of pantry operations, and her dog Chu-chi, at their office. (Tania Savayan/The Journal News)