

Sunday Column – Community Support
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The past couple of weeks have been a whirlwind. In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Irma, Flournoy Property Management provided PAWS Humane with access to a 35,000 square foot warehouse in Columbus, Georgia to use as an emergency shelter. A local fencing company installed chain link to create 40 individual runs. We reallocated staff and we put out a call for volunteers. We swept, mopped and dusted and we christened our temporary facility “PAWS North”.

Over the past two weeks volunteers working with Florida Urgent Rescue and the Pit Sisters of Clay County assessed and prepared 34 large breed dogs for transport to Columbus. Volunteer drivers make the 10-12 hour round trip with 8 to 10 dogs.

A week ago my amazing husband, Dave, left Columbus at 9 am driving the Best Friends Cat-mobile and returned at 10 pm that evening with a full load of cats and kittens which he collected from multiple locations. All told we have taken in 37 dogs and 43 cats from Clay, Duval and Manatee Counties as well as a little city, with a population of 12, called Weeki Wachee.

A couple of the shelters we have been working with were badly damaged during the storm. Clay County Animal Care and Control was flooded. Employees were forced to swim to the dogs in the back kennels and pull them out by boat. Animals were moved to various boarding facilities throughout Clay County as they awaited transport to PAWS Humane. The entire shelter will be out of commission for months.

The emerging stray populations are overwhelming these small rural counties. The dogs and cats in their care prior to the storm would have had to be euthanized to make room for new strays if it weren't for out-of-state shelters willing to take them in. Florida Urgent Rescue is sending animals out by plane and van load nearly every day to shelters in the Midwest and Northeast, to Atlanta, and to PAWS Humane.

We continue to work with our hurricane dogs by providing lots of walks, food puzzles, aroma therapy, and additional training. Our veterinary clinic is providing any additional vetting not already done in Florida, such as spay/neuter. Without exception these are great dogs, all deserving of an equally great “forever” home.

Our cats are housed in our community room where volunteers care for them daily. One enormous ginger aptly named, Churchill, arrived just before the storm. The poor guy was traumatized by his experience and barely moved for days. For the past week he has shared office space with our animal care manager and outreach coordinator and he has finally come out of his shell. He is a beautiful and sweet cat.

Personally, I have always preferred rescuing pets over purchasing a purebred puppy or kitten. Each rescued pet has a story to tell us and our 67 hurricane pets have amazing stories of resilience and the power of love.

Bobbi Yeo lives in Opelika, AL. She is the CEO of PAWS Humane in Columbus, GA, an animal shelter and veterinary clinic offering low-cost spay/neuter and other services to the public. Email her at byeo@pawshumane.org with your comments and story ideas.