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Vet Techs drive to help animals

By James E. Thomas

Imagine if you woke up one day and you suddenly had no home, no food and no one to care for you? For many neglected, abandoned, abused, or homeless animals in our community, this nightmarish existence is a reality they face every day.

However, Pensacola State College's Veterinary Technology Program, in partnership with local animal shelters and organizations, is looking to help our less fortunate four-legged friends by hosting the Vet Tech Program's Animal Food and Supply Drive which began on October 6 and runs until December 1.

So which animal shelters and organizations are benefiting from the Food and Supply Drive?

"We do a lot of work with Santa Rosa and Escambia County Animal Services," said Christen Pearson, Vice President of PSC's Student Chapter of the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (SCNAVTA), "We also reach out to the Leaning Post Ranch." (an organization that takes care of abandoned or neglected horses and offers therapeutic horse rides for disabled children, adults and veterans in the community)

Escambia and Santa Rosa Animal Services provide the dogs and cats for PSC's Vet Tech Program in order to assist with the training of students currently enrolled. Leaning Post Ranch does the same by allowing students to assist with larger animals. Pearson explained, this is the reason why

the Vet Tech Program and the SCNAVTA have decided to give back by holding the Food and Supply Drive.

The primary goals of PSC's SCNAVTA and the Vet Tech Program's Food and Supply Drive is to promote awareness as well as help gather donations for their cause.

"A big part is just talking about it [the food and supply drive] and letting people know... because they're [the animal shelters] always in need of the basic necessities," said Ashley Lombardi, SCNAVTA President. "Networking or posting it on Facebook... just simple little things that if more people knew about I feel like we'd have a greater effect. Even just the word of mouth makes such a huge difference."

Besides promoting awareness about the Food and Supply Drive, one of the donations that is needed the most is puppy and kitten food, especially during the spring and early summer which is "puppy and kitten season," according to Vet Tech Program Director Professor Sarah Meyer-Paterson. With those seasons rapidly approaching the shelters' needs will only grow.

In September of this year alone, Escambia County Animal Services took in over six hundred animals, most of them dogs and cats, according to a monthly report the shelter released.

Food isn't the only item in demand. Lombardi and Pearson both agree other supplies like bleach, blankets, and toys are also needed by the shelters, so they can provide proper care for the animals.

There are ways to find out exactly what items are needed the most:

"Shelters post updated 'need' lists on their webpages. Shelter directors can also be contacted to see what immediate needs they have," said Paterson.

There is a common factor shelters share, and it's something needed no matter what time of year it is:

"The resource that all shelters need are hard-working volunteers who can help clean, feed, and exercise the homeless animals," affirmed Paterson.

Many college students are on a tight budget, so being able to afford to donate food or other items isn't an option but, one thing every student can afford to give is time.

There is a plethora of ways a person can help like, "Walk dogs, play with the cats, wash food bowls, scrub out kennels and litter pans, do yard work." These are just a few of the things students can do to help that Paterson suggested. "Shelters rely heavily on their volunteer work force. Volunteering only costs an individual some time," Paterson said.

The small, simple things that anyone could do to help can make a world of difference to an animal in need.

"Even if you just go to a shelter and just hang out with one for an hour out of the month that makes such a significant difference because that dog gets a little bit of socialization and has a better chance of being adopted," said Lombardi.

Donations can be dropped off in front of room 1734 in building 17 on PSC's main campus or at the Vet Tech Building in Room 3200 at the Warrington campus. Volunteers are always needed at the shelters.

That's what it's all about, helping the community and animals in need.

Pearson summed it up best, "We need to help out our local shelters. Just a little bit helps out. It's about the community, and the more we help the community the more it grows."