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Humane Society of Berks County Announces Re-Instatement of Successful “Free To A Great Home” Emergency Cat Adoption Program to Combat Euthanasia

The Humane Society of Berks County, Berks County’s leader in animal welfare, announced yesterday that incoming cat numbers at its Reading shelter have reached critical levels. In response, the HSBC has re-instated the “Free To A Great Home” emergency cat adoption program. The program, created last year to address the shelter crowding crisis faced by the HSBC during the summer months, provides free adoption for any previously sterilized cat to qualified adopters. “Last year this program doubled cat adoptions when we needed them most and led to the first summer in recorded history at the HSBC when we did not have to euthanize cats simply because we ran out of space at the shelter,” said Humane Society executive director, Karel I. Minor. “We hope that by putting this program in place now we can have the same result this summer.”

Because of the overwhelming response by the public and the press coverage received for the program, adoptions went up significantly for cats and dogs- and stayed up. The result was a 17% overall increase in successful adoptions in 2005 over the previous year.

Because these higher adoption numbers continued into 2006, the HSBC did not reach the normal overcrowding crisis for a full month past when it normally hit. “This program, considered controversial among some in the animal sheltering community, not only saved cats’ lives last summer, it kept saving lives throughout the year,” said Minor.

Adopters wishing to save a cat’s life through the “Free To A Great Home” emergency cat adoption program must go through the normal adoption screening process. Once approved, the adoption of a previously sterilized cat is free and has all the same benefits

and requirements as a “regular” adoption. Adoptions include some vaccinations, deworming medication, a 14 day health guarantee through VCA Hospitals, and microchipping. Said Minor, “Our hope is that an adopter who was thinking about adopting a cat will do it now when the need is greatest or perhaps even adopt an adult cat through this program at the same time they adopt a kitten in the regular program.”

The success of last year’s program led to its recognition on a national level. The American Humane Association, a national animal and shelter advocacy group with no affiliation the HSBC, selected the program from a multitude of nominations to be featured as a “Best Industry Practices” adoption program example the Leadership Forum at its national conference in Chicago this September 28 -30. “The HSBC is proud to have this program recognized, particularly on the heels of having our PetNet program recognized as a “Governmental Innovation” by Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government,” said Minor. “It just goes to show that with community support, hard work, and a well thought out plan, even local agencies can come up with programs of a national caliber.”

The “Free To A Great Home” emergency cat adoption program will be in effect until the summer overcrowding crisis comes to an end. The program is in effect year-round for seniors, 65 years and older.

The Humane Society of Berks County serves all of Berks County and surrounding communities, sheltering 7,000 animals each year. It is a private, non-profit organization funded through donations and service fees. In addition to enforcing Pennsylvania’s animal cruelty laws, the Humane Society offers adoption services, spay and neuter services, humane education, pet behavioral counseling, and helps stray, injured and mistreated animals. The Humane Society of Berks County is located at 1801 N. 11th Street, Reading.

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