

# Vet clinics aid a dog's best friend

Disadvantaged humans benefit from food drive

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Valley Animal Hospital is changing the scope of its annual food drive this year — from an in-house competition among employees to a statewide effort to help Arizona's disadvantaged human residents.

What started as a simple food drive for the Midtown clinic's 60 employees three years ago is now reaching out to more than a dozen in the state. And the community will be able to contribute for the first time this year, which is why the food drive's goal has been doubled.

In the first year, employees brought in 1,400 pounds of food. The donations increased to 3,600 pounds in 2005. Then in 2006, organizer and hospital technician Ericka Hughes put out the call to a few veterinary clinics in Tucson, and more than 7,400 pounds of food and \$865 were donated to the Tucson Community Food Bank.

With more additions to this year's participation, Hughes said she has increased the goal to 15,000 pounds of food.

"I wanted to make it higher, but I just didn't know how many clinics were going to be involved," she said.

It's only a small fraction of the millions of pounds of food the food bank collects every year, but officials say last year's haul was a respectable amount.

"Seven thousand, four hundred pounds of food is not a bad local drive," said Jack Parris, marketing and communications manager at the Community Food Bank.

A major change in the drive this year is opening it to the community, Hughes said. All participating clinics will have receptacles for the public to drop off nonperishable food.

Hughes also is reaching out to more veterinary hospitals for Veterinary Food Drive 2007, and invitations to participate were returned from seven Tucson locations and about seven others in Yuma and Phoenix as of Friday, Hughes said.

This will nearly quadruple the number of clinics taking part in the drive compared with last year.

The local animal-related businesses getting involved this year include the **Veterinary Specialty Center of Tucson**, the Southern Arizona Veterinary Specialty & Emergency Center, Pima Pet Clinic and the Reid Park Zoo.

Not to disparage pets, but Hughes said she didn't want to organize a pet-food drive because it would overshadow the one done in the winter in collaboration with the Humane Society of Southern Arizona.

"That's a pretty big food drive in itself, and we do so well with that one that another food drive for pets would diminish the effect of the one we do at Christmastime," she said.

Esther Mariscal, the office manager at Pima Pet Clinic, said the business has been involved with the food drive for three years, and staffers are excited to continue.

"It's a good thing for the community and great morale for the clinic," she said.

Among the hospitals that took part in last year's drive, Valley Animal Hospital contributed almost half the food. Hughes is calling the food drive a "friendly competition" among veterinary clinics, and even though this year's event is branching out to bigger facilities, employees of the Midtown clinic are convinced that they can maintain the title. The winning hospital gets a free lunch.

"I have to admit a small amount of hospital pride, so I'd love to think we're going to be in the running for the top numbers," technician Brendan DeSmet said.

"But if everyone's pushing people to bring in pounds and pounds of food, the end beneficiary is going to be the community food banks."

Veterinary Food Drive 2007
The food drive begins next Monday and ends on Oct. 8. Bring nonperishable foods or money to one of the following sites. Please don't donate canned soups or stews, and healthful foods are suggested.
<b>Tucson</b>
Valley Animal Hospital, 4984 E. 22nd St.
<b>Veterinary Specialty Center of Tucson, 4909 N. La Cañada Drive</b>
Pima Pet Clinic, 4832 E. Speedway
Southern Arizona Veterinary Specialty & Emergency Center, 141 E. Fort Lowell Road
Adobe Veterinary Center, 8300 E. Tanque Verde Road
VCA Animal Medical Center, 2661 N. First Ave.
Reid Park Zoo, 1100 S. Randolph Way
<b>Sierra Vista</b>
Coronado Veterinary Hospital, 4181 E. Glenn Road
<b>Benson</b>
Benson Animal Hospital, 1195 S. State Highway 80