



Everything New Orleans

# The Times-Picayune

## Film documents pet rescue efforts

Sunday, May 04, 2008

By Ann Nungesser

It begins with the view from a boat speeding on brown water above the submerged streets of New Orleans. Images on the screen include dogs on rooftops, scenes from an attic refuge.

"Katrina Tails" is a documentary that follows animal rescue efforts after Hurricane Katrina, and tracks several searches for beloved pets by residents from New Orleans, St. Bernard Parish and Waveland, Miss.

Producer and director Denise Richard Donnelly has followed gorillas through the jungle while making movies, and yet the "Katrina Tails" shoot involved what she called "the most arduous circumstances" she's ever experienced while filming. As noted in the movie, 50,000 to 100,000 pets were lost in three states -- an animal crisis without precedent.

This feature-length film documents not just the facts, but the emotions involved. This is a must-see for animal lovers, even those who have avoided other Katrina-related productions.

Memorable moments include the determined rescuer who swam across the street, went underwater to enter a house, grabbed two dogs floating on cushions up to the ceiling, took a breath and swam back out.

Another memorable moments: the "Sophie's Choice" agony of firemen deciding which of hundreds of dogs to help. The outrage at the cruel and pointless shooting by authorities of horses that were fed and watered daily. The selflessness of a man in an attic with water up to his face who put his two dogs above him out of the water. A St. Bernard native, whose local accent somehow required subtitles for a national audience, swearing he would drown before leaving his dog behind again.

Long after the flood has receded, the problem of finding, identifying, and getting back the pets remained. Hardly any of the pets saved were micro-chipped, and identification often was lost.

This recent showing of "Katrina Tails" was at the Deutsches Haus, an appropriate venue. Located on South Galvez Street in the middle of the city, the Haus is a Katrina survivor that was severely damaged. Its members have completed the renovation and repair of the first floor, and are working on the second floor. Having survived the storm, it's now in another fight for survival since the planned medical complex for the area threatens possible destruction.

A historic statue of Berlin's bear mascot greets visitors when they enter the Haus. There is also a living de facto mascot, Max, who often accompanies his owner, James Treadway, to the Haus. Despite his large size, Max is still a puppy. Max is especially good with children and will pull a wagon in this year's Oktoberfest parade. Treadway and Max have been living in a FEMA trailer, so understandably the first command Max learned was "back up," since there is no room for him to turn around.

Gary Michael Smith and Brenda Floyd introduced "Katrina Tails" at the Haus showing on behalf of Donnelly, who lives in California. Smith is involved in the New Orleans film industry.

Smith and Floyd said they have had positive reactions from the film's audiences. The Haus viewers were no exception. The audience included both Haus President Keith Oldendorf, Vice President Tommy Mertz, veterinarian Andrea Lorroque and board member Hans Heinemann.

Heinemann is a Gretna resident with a distinctive German accent and a soft heart for animals. He's had up to five dogs at a time, always adopted when they couldn't be cared for by their original owners. Currently he lives with Happy, a poodle mix that once ruled the fourth floor of the former Little Sisters of the Poor nursing home in Algiers.

Heinemann's reaction to the film, the situation requiring people to leave pets behind, and the new law mandating that animals be part of evacuation plans, was simply, "We should not need a law to be humane." Who could disagree?

To purchase or for more information on "Katrina Tails," visit [www.katrinatails.com](http://www.katrinatails.com). For more information on the Deutsches Haus, visit [www.deutscheshaus.org](http://www.deutscheshaus.org).

.....

Speaking of Katrina animal rescue: Public charities and governmental entities can apply for Noah's Wish Grants for the reimbursement of direct costs associated with the rescue and care of animals affected by Katrina. Maximum amount is \$50,000. The deadline to apply is July 1. The Greater New Orleans Foundation, a philanthropic organization, is handling the grants.

Noah's Wish was a nonprofit that participated in Katrina animal rescue. After news reports showed its efforts, contributions poured in, but some of the money was improperly used for other purposes, so the California attorney general's office stepped in. The result was a settlement that restricted the use of the money to the animal victims of Katrina and its aftermath. The money can't be used for other disasters or future disaster preparedness. For more information and an application, visit [gnof.org](http://gnof.org).

.....

National Pet Week will be celebrated Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Heaven's Pets at Lake Lawn Metairie within the Metairie Cemetery. The event will include adoptable pets from local shelters and rescue groups, canine bomb sniffing demonstrations, dog training tips, pet-centric businesses and pet stores, pet portraits, treats and food. Call (504) 482-7387 for information.

.....

Louisiana SPCA dog obedience courses held at Jefferson Feed, Pet and Garden, Jefferson Highway and Central Avenue, including beginner, clicker style beginner and intermediate, start next week. Call (504) 368-5191.

.....

Canines on the Catwalk, a people and pet fashion show to benefit the Humane Society of Louisiana, will be held on May 17 from 7 to 10 p.m. at Michaul's Cajun Dance Hall, 840 St. Charles Ave., New Orleans. Tickets are \$50. The event, sponsored by Michaul's and Prima Donna's Closet, includes an open Cajun buffet, soft drinks, wine and beer. Visit [www.humanela.org](http://www.humanela.org) or call 888-6-HUMANE for more information.

.....

The Friends of the Jefferson Animal Shelter will hold a Shelter Open House and Pet Adoption Day on May 17 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the East Bank Shelter. Visit the pets available for adoption, see the shelter's new look, and watch demonstrations by Swamp Dogs Canine Agility Team. Call

(504) 736-6111 for more information. As of this writing the shelter had several purebred dogs available, including doxies, Chihuahuas and a smooth collie. The Friends always need volunteers for walking dogs, fostering, fundraising or at special events such as the open house, adoption days, and the fall Friends' Fest. Call or visit [www.fjas.petfinder.com](http://www.fjas.petfinder.com).

.....

Ann Nungesser is a Belle Chasse resident who writes about animal issues. She can be reached at (504) 912-8134 or by sending an e-mail to [animaladviser@gmail.com](mailto:animaladviser@gmail.com).