

Pet food bank busier than ever

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SOUTH DAYTONA -- When it comes to keeping their cats and dogs fed and healthy, pet owners in need of assistance are benefiting from an increase in donations.

Organizers of Sophie's Circle, a pet food bank at 933 Beville Road, Suite 1023, say distribution days are busier than ever following recent news reports about the non-profit's urgent need for help.

"The reaction was very powerful," said founder Kathy Blackman of Port Orange. "Within a day's time, we were swamped with calls from people who are trying to keep their pet families intact."

Started in April with the sole purpose of helping pet owners keep their animals during tough times, the number of people seeking assistance has recently more than doubled to about 250 families per day, Blackman said.

Sophie's Circle is open from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. every Wednesday. These days, pet owners arrive long before Blackman and Christi Sharp, the executive director, crank open the warehouse door.

Raising the awareness level about the pet food bank has also spurred a rise in donations, with concerned citizens dropping off checks, pet food -- both canned and dry -- and other useful items.

The contributions are extremely valuable on distribution days but provisions dwindle quickly as pet owners seeking assistance visit throughout the day, Blackman said.

"When we left last week, we only had 20 pounds of cat food left and no cat litter, so we were running low on that again," said Blackman. "Every week is a struggle, but we won't stop being there for those who need help."

Job layoffs and income reductions are among some of the reasons cited by people who are turning to Sophie's Circle rather than giving up their beloved pets to other homes or the local humane society, said Sharp, who also lives in Port Orange.

With assistance coming in from a variety of sources, including local churches and Girl Scout troops, Sharp said she hopes interest in Sophie's Circle will remain strong.

"We can't thank people enough, because without their contributions and support we wouldn't be able to help pet owners in the community that are in need," she said.

Blackman and Sharp are considering the addition of a distribution facility in West Volusia because of the number of people who have been making the drive to South Daytona for pet support.

Currently the only pet food bank in Volusia County, items distributed through Sophie's Circle are obtained through fundraising efforts, local veterinarians and pet store businesses, and from individual donations.

For more information about Sophie's Circle, including how to make donations, visit SophiesCircle.com or call 386-843-2472.