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Downturned Economy Not the Cat's Meow ... Humane non-profit feeling the impact.

By Sharon Allen Gilder

For The Almanac

The Benjamin Franklin Room at Potomac's Bolger Center was purring with warm and fuzzy feelings last month as nearly 100 animal lovers gathered for Friends of Montgomery County Animals' (FMCA) annual luncheon fundraiser replete with a CAbi fashion show and numerous vendor boutiques. Large projection screens sporting photos of cats ready to find a forever home embraced both sides of the ballroom.



From left: CAbi commentator Charlie Wilson with models, Melanie Williams, CAbi consultant Lori Veirs, Ellie Brown, Lisa Gatons, Susan Cameron, Laura Salisbury, Katie Fechko, Kris Veirs, Janet Fenton, Ann Richardson, Pam Dawson, Arianne Tavakolian and Deb McDonald.

FMCA, established in 1974, is an all-volunteer non-profit that recruits foster families for cats and dogs, runs successful trapspay/ neuter-release (TNR) programs, and supports humane efforts throughout the County in harmony with their motto: "dignity for animals."

Fundraising in the current economic conditions has been a challenge for the organization and it is not alone. According to a CNN report, the 100 largest charities in the United States have suffered an 11 percent decrease in donations and donations from the wealthiest Americans have decreased by 34 percent.

Claire Proffitt, FMCA president, noted that the organization experienced a new low in TNR responses and adoptions. "We chipped away at the animal overpopulation problem by supporting 34 TNR's and we placed 142 kittens and cats, but that is not nearly enough."

Because of the economic uncertainty, more attention has been focused on cruelty and abandonment cases and helping people in need keep their cats and dogs by assisting with veterinary bills.

Artist Vera Michelle Elliott brought her talents to the event with 20 percent of the sales of her dog portraits going to FMCA's projects. She credits her mother for her love of canines. "My mom breeds dogs and I've always liked them and have been raised with them. They're like siblings. They understand you when nobody else does. They have a power. Dogs are like, 'Just love me.'" she said.

Potomac resident Connie Fike, a member for 10 years, said she supports FMCA's whole mission. "Rather than euthanize animals, get people to adopt them. It's not just what they're doing for the animals, but what the animals do for you. You feel something positive flowing back."

A recent article in the group's newsletter by board member Sue Recher states, "The number of animals FMCA can place is a function of the number of foster homes available."

Proffitt concluded her statements with a plea for foster homes. "Not only have the number of foster homes decreased, but two of our main foster counselors have been fighting breast cancer and another core volunteer has undergone multiple serious surgeries. We need foster homes. You provide the housing, food and love. FMCA takes care of the vet bills."

For more information visit: www.friendsofmontgomerycountyanimals.org