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A dog's day in fashion

Event raises funds for canines, felines

Stephanie Green (Contact)

Wednesday, March 18, 2009

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The Washington social scene since 2007 has been raining cats and dogs with an event that blends felines, Fidos and families for the **Washington Humane Society's** fashion-show fundraiser, Fashion for Paws.

When relationships blogger **Andrea Rodgers** happened upon a forlorn kitten behind a grocery store in Glover Park, she decided to dig in to do more for her cat - aptly named Lucky - and others in need of protection.

"I was familiar with [the Washington Humane Society's] mission and the work they were doing. I thought about how I've raised a lot of money for

various charities in town and felt compelled to lend my talents and time to the Washington Humane Society," Ms. Rodgers says.

On March 28, the third annual Fashion for Paws will bark back at the Italian Embassy as models ranging from local celebrities to everyday animal lovers who each raised at least \$3,000 sashay down the runway in spring fashions provided by Tysons Galleria - with some four-legged friends as their best accessories.

Tara de Nicolas, the marketing director of the Washington Humane Society, who worked alongside Ms. Rodgers to bring the event to fruition, expects 1,000 people to attend the show and says the event easily will outpace last year's record of \$200,000 despite the economic climate.

Ms. de Nicolas explains that the money generated by the event through ticket sales and the funds raised by models has practical applications, as many of the animals brought to the Humane Society have been abused and may require costly surgery.

The Humane Society also feeds, spays or neuters, and rehabilitates animals at the two Humane Society shelters in the District in addition to its animal advocacy and education work.

Ms. de Nicolas says Fashion for Paws has become a standard-bearer for "out-of-the-box" charity fundraising because it differs from the galas and direct-mail campaigns used by many philanthropies.

"We needed something different, something to spice it up and something that would capture people's attention," says Ms. de Nicolas, who has rescued stray animals since childhood and modeled Fashion for Paws after a similar local event, Fashion Fights Poverty.

When Ms. Rodgers and Ms. de Nicolas first developed the idea, they relied on their voluminous lists of contacts from Washington social and charitable circles. The common denominator among their contacts was an interest in fashion, especially in the spring, when the ladies-who-lunch set looks to clean out winter wardrobes.

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