

# SANTA MARIA TIMES

Looking Forward

## **Local shelters help out when fires rage**

By Mark James Miller, December 28, 2018

November saw fires of colossal proportions burning out of control at both ends of our state. Thousands of people were forced to evacuate, hundreds of thousands of acres were burned, entire communities were leveled, the houses of the humble as well as the rich and famous were destroyed.

In the midst of so much human misery it is easy to forget that fires destroy not only homes and forests, they also threaten the animals in their path — domestic animals, farm animals, animals living in the wild. The loss of a beloved pet can be so heart-wrenching that some pet owners experience broken-heart syndrome, in which a person exhibits symptoms of a heart attack in their grief, and the intense feelings of loss can last as long as a year.

With that in mind, it is heartening to know that when shelters closest to the fires were overwhelmed with animals in need, shelters on the Central Coast pitched in to help. “Since Nov. 8, we’ve taken in over 270 animals evacuated from the twin fires,” said Greg Cooper, director of community outreach for the Humane Society of Ventura County. “They include horses, cows, donkeys, pigs, goats, chickens, ducks and a few other animals.”

Shelters also open their doors to the two-legged victims of the fires and other disasters. “Twice since December 2017 we’ve opened up our shelter as an emergency evacuation center for families directly impacted first by the Thomas fire, then the flooding in early 2018, and now for the Hill and Woolsey fires,” said Cooper.

Woods Humane Society also steps up to help when crises like these occur. Jill Tucker, the executive director, said, “Woods routinely assists overcrowded shelters in neighboring communities by transferring adoptable pets to our facilities in SLO County. Last year we were able to assist more than 1,200 animals through these lifesaving efforts.”

It would be comforting to think these terrible fires are an anomaly, but the unpleasant truth is they are becoming the new normal. Three of California’s worst fires have taken place in the past three years, and in spite of President Trump’s insistence that climate change isn’t real, global warming is a direct cause. As climate change continues to impact our planet, the danger of fires in California is going to increase. One study indicates the amount of forest burned in the Sierra foothills will double in the next 30 years.

How do we prepare to save our pets in case the worst happens? Sean Hawkins of the Santa Maria Valley Humane Society suggests having your dog or cat fitted with a microchip in order to easily identify them.

“It’s the first thing all vets and shelters will look for,” he said. “Have pictures of your pets on your cell phone, as well as a record of their vaccinations.”

Above all, he recommends, “be prepared for fires, earthquakes and floods.”

The Humane Society also suggests pet owners should always take their pet with them. Never leave your pet behind. You should also prepare a travel kit for your pet, including food, water, needed medications. Keep travel carriers handy, and find out ahead of time which public evacuation shelters will accept pets.

To find out how you can donate, volunteer or otherwise contribute to these local shelters, you can go to the following urls: [www.smvhs.org](http://www.smvhs.org) for the Santa Maria Valley Humane Society; [www.hsvc.org](http://www.hsvc.org) for the Humane Society of Ventura County; and

[https://santamariatimes.com/opinion/columnists/mark-james-miller-local-shelters-help-out-when-fires-rage/article\\_0377aaf3-9050-5b7c-bfb3-eoffa9f74163.html](https://santamariatimes.com/opinion/columnists/mark-james-miller-local-shelters-help-out-when-fires-rage/article_0377aaf3-9050-5b7c-bfb3-eoffa9f74163.html) 3

www.woodshumanesociety.org for Woods Humane. They all welcome volunteers and rely on donations in order to continuing doing their good work.

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