



Colorado Association of Animal Control Officers
P.O. Box 1921
Longmont, CO 80502

April 2, 2009

To Whom It May Concern:

Pueblo Animal Services would like to nominate the Pueblo West Fire Department for the Friends of Animal Control Award. Chief Brian Caserta and Captain Rob Supthen have been continually supportive of animal control and understand the importance of working collaboratively with animal control to protect citizens and animals in the community.

On July 6th, 2005, a wildland fire later named the "Mason Gulch Fire" began in neighboring Custer County south of Wetmore, Colorado. The fire quickly moved into Pueblo County and before full containment 11 days later, it threatened 900 homes and consumed 11,357 acres. 5000 residents were evacuated from the area. The Humane Society of the Pikes Peak Region DBA/Pueblo Animal Services set up an emergency animal shelter at the Colorado State Fairgrounds in Pueblo, Colorado. There we housed 129 evacuated animals. 36 of those were Horses, Donkeys and Mules. Pueblo Animal Services received numerous reports of equines and other animals that were in need evacuation from the declared fire area, but Animal Welfare Officers trained in large animal handling were denied access to perform these rescues and evacuations. In Federally declared wildland fires, only personnel that possess a "Red Card" and are equipped with required specialized gear, are allowed entry into fire areas. "Red Cards" are obtained after specific wildland fire fighter training and a physical fitness test. None of Humane Society of the Pikes Peak Region's Animal Welfare Officers in any of its divisions possessed a Red Card. This left the evacuation and rescue of animals, including equines up to firefighters with little or no animal handling training, risking the safety of both humans and animals.

Ultimately no pet animals perished or suffered during the Mason Gulch Fire due to our inability to rescue them, but this experience initiated change in our agency to assure that this situation would not reoccur in the future.

From that point on, research was done and inquiries made to determine just how Animal Welfare Officers could obtain "Red Cards". In December of 2006, Code 3 Associates, known for providing quality training in the Animal Welfare field, tested a 3 day wildland fire class. Three Animal Welfare Officers from the Humane Society of the Pikes Peak Region completed this course. Several months later, in early 2007, an ally was found in Fire Chief Brian Caserta from the Pueblo West Fire Department. He graciously offered to allow additional Officers to attend classes provided for his Firefighters. He also arraigned for the administration of the required physical fitness test and provided for the issuance of the coveted "Red Cards". Since that time we have worked closely with Captain Rob Sutphen to continue training and certification of our animal welfare officers. We currently have 10 Animal Welfare Officers red carded and plan to continue to increase that number annually.

Captain Rob Sutphen has worked at spreading the word to other fire departments about our program and capabilities. He and Chief Caserta's support of our program continues to increase our capabilities and raise awareness throughout the fire fighter community. Their efforts have benefited the profession of animal control by raising awareness of the need for animal control officers to obtain the necessary training and certifications to be "Red Carded". Without the assistance of the Pueblo West Fire Department, we would not be nearly as well trained and prepared to respond to wildland fire events. Well trained and prepared animal control agencies clearly benefit the goals and objectives of the profession.

The Pueblo West Fire Department is clearly a Friend of Animal Control and I hope that you will consider them for the CAACO Friends of Animal Control Award. Please contact me with any questions regarding this nomination.

Nominee address:

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Sincerely,

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