



Meeting Challenges in Challenging Times—With a Challenge

by Sandra Wright, DVM

Snohomish Veterinary Hospital and Pilchuck Veterinary Hospital have always served the small community of Snohomish and outlying areas with a friendly rivalry. This often occurs between veterinary clinics with similar high standards for veterinary medicine and customer service. However, things heated up recently when technician Ms. Kari Griffith at Pilchuck issued a challenge to the staff at Snohomish. Gather as much people and pet food as possible in the next three weeks prior to Thanksgiving to be donated to food banks and humane societies. The winner, judged by ton of food per employee, would be treated to a pizza extravaganza at the loser's expense.

Snohomish agreed and the race was on. Pilchuck quickly began collecting items donated principally by the hospital staff. One generous client dropped by 900 lbs of pet food. Snohomish started out a bit slower. However, the heat was on when Ms. Griffith drove by Snohomish a week or so later with a half-bed truck filled with goods and the staff at Snohomish looked at their half-filled bean of meager items. This was now war.

The staff at Snohomish began calling grocery stores and pet food retailers, asking for donations of damaged cans and bags of pet foods. Retailers also donated pet toys, pet beds, and even bird food that were not tallied in the final tonnage. Iams and Hill's graciously donated food. Pet's Choice, which owns Snohomish Veterinary Hospital, allowed Pet's Choice employees to purchase food for donation through Pet's Choice at a reduced price. The challenge was truly a community event as clients from both clinics contributed greatly to the success of the holiday drive.

At each clinic, employees borrowed trucks to gather in all the donations, then carefully unloaded and reloaded food for the weigh-in on clinic scales. As one can imagine, this took quite a bit of work. At Pilchuck Veterinary Hospital, Ms. Griffith played a key role, besides initiating the challenge. Pilchuck collected over 2500 lbs of food, 80% of which was people food. All collections from Pilchuck were donated to the Snohomish food bank. Ms. Griffith found it very rewarding to shop with donated monies for specific items such as baby food that the food bank specifically needed.

I spoke with Manager Jackie Currie at Snohomish Veterinary Hospital regarding their part in the challenge. Staff persons Carrie Peterson, Holly Leppert, Melissa Brown and Nikki Couffer were the principals at Snohomish but all the staff was instrumental in filling in for the regular duties of these individuals when the going got busy. When all was said and done, Snohomish collected a whooping over 6300 lbs of primarily pet food. Donations from Snohomish Veterinary Hospital were distributed to The Animal Shelter of North County in Arlington, the Everett Animal Shelter, as well as several local food banks.

The Animal Shelter of North County had only a few bags of pet food remaining when a truckload of food from Snohomish rolled in unannounced one day in November. Debbie Cusack, president of the shelter executive board explained how crucial this donation was. The shelter, which serves North Snohomish County, had recently reopened in mid September under a new board of directors and membership and was sorely in need of supplies. The over 1500 lbs of pet food donated from Snohomish Veterinary Hospital fed the shelter's dogs and cats during the following two weeks until other donations were received.

In all, nearly 9,000 lbs of pet and people food were donated by Pilchuck and Snohomish veterinary hospitals to their community. As Manager Jackie Currie at Snohomish Veterinary Hospital explained, the challenge created a hospital team working toward a common goal benefiting both people and their pets. Employees discovered a renewed sense of teamwork, organization, and respect for their fellow employees. They learned to rely on each other, particularly when job responsibilities had to be shared. The project extended the boundaries for what a veterinary hospital thought they could contribute. Ms. Currie also mentioned that the challenge helped foster a better working and referral environment between the two clinics. Furthermore, the project demonstrated to the community of Snohomish that two veterinary hospitals could work for the greater good of the community in a powerful way.

After the food drive was complete, the staff at Snohomish Veterinary Hospital was treated to their winning pizza dinner complete with cake and balloons by the staff at Pilchuck. Although Snohomish was the winner, Jackie Currie was quick to credit Kari Griffith at Pilchuck who made the whole project possible with her challenge. As Ms. Currie mentioned, the focus grew from a desire to win to a desire to create the biggest impact in their community.

Has your clinic done a similar project for your community? Pilchuck Veterinary Hospital has also participated in a giving tree for children identified through the Snohomish Department of Health and Social Services, a project employees and the hospital has sponsored for several years. Do you have veterinarians or staff making a difference in community projects outside the realm of veterinary medicine? We would like to hear from you. We would like to publish similar stories of giving in our newsletter and promote community work being done by the veterinary community during our annual convention in October. Please contact Dr. Sandy Wright through the WSVMA office to share your story.

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