

“Wags Up!”

Local Unit Launches Animal Rescue Program

By Lt Janet Antonacci

(New York Wing, South Eastern Group, White Plains) It was the first four legged save for South Eastern Group and a last chance at life for four Georgia shelter dogs as CAP members loaded the animals onboard the Cessna 182 and went wheels up this past December from New York’s Westchester County Airport. The boxer/lab mix pups had just arrived via private jet from Gainesville, Georgia and had been scheduled to be euthanized there in a high-kill shelter later that week. The end of the year is a particularly harrowing time for overlooked dogs in overcrowded facilities. “The shelters tend to put down a lot of the animals, so the pressure was on to get these animals to safety,” pointed out crewmember Maj Jill Silverman, who was instrumental in launching SEG’s animal rescue effort. The flight to safe haven for the fortunate four was planned in conjunction with Animal Rescue Flights (ARF,) a non-profit organization whose volunteer pilot members use their own planes to rescue endangered dogs from overpopulated shelters. The CAP crew completed the second leg of the trip, transporting the three-month-old canines to a no-kill shelter in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. There, the dogs once destined to be destroyed will be petted, pampered, and protected as they await loving homes.

PILOTS AND PAWS

“CAP’s involvement in animal rescue just seems to make sense,” says Maj Silverman, “The animals need to be rescued, we have the planes and the pilots who need to fly to keep their proficiency up – it’s a win-win situation”. To get the program off the ground, Silverman began by emailing SEG’s Form 5 pilots, outlining her plan and asking for volunteers. The response was overwhelming. “All of us love to fly, and this gives us a chance to give back to the community,” says Westchester Hudson Senior Squadron member Mission Pilot David Nelson, who has flown several of the flights since the program’s inception. In order to fly a rescue, the pilots need to join the involved organization, as well as adhere to some CAP-specific regulations. Upon request for involvement from the sender, Maj Silverman notifies the pool of pilots and then coordinates the flight with the first pilot to respond. Since it is a C17 proficiency and planning flight, pilots are responsible for all costs involved. Flights are released according to CAP regulations by a Flight Release Officer. When working in conjunction with an organization like ARF, both Major Silverman and the CAP pilots who have signed up review upcoming rescues. ARF’s flight coordinators, all pilots themselves, work with the senders and receivers of the animals, planning and

mapping out flight routes. Often these flights transport their animal passengers over long distances using pilot relays, and CAP pilots volunteer for a leg of the trip.

PROVIDING SAFE HAVEN

“Flying is fun,” says ARF co organizer Clark Burgard, “but helping animals in need is rewarding in ways that cannot be measured.” But his isn’t the only group with a heart. There are many other organizations, shelters and even individuals willing to put in the time and effort to help safeguard the victims of the country’s animal overpopulation problem. Pilots ‘N Paws, for one, also enlists volunteer pilots to fly the doomed dogs to new lives. On the local level, several area shelters often provide ground transportation for dogs destined to be euthanized in shelters that have no room nor offer any hope for man’s supposed best friends. For these fortunate rescues, who often make the long trip to safe shelters in crowded vans, CAP planes can provide a more efficient and gentler way to reach their destinations and the qualified members of the community looking to adopt them. CAP plans are currently underway to coordinate efforts with local shelters and individuals, to help give back or, in this case, “bark” to the community.

BARKS AND BENEFITS

Since the start of the program, SEG has flown 5 rescues, transporting a total of 26 dogs to safe haven in no-kill shelters in New York, Rhode Island and Vermont. The crew’s canine companions consisted of all shapes, sizes, ages and breeds. One dog, a dachshund mix struck by a car and sustaining multiple broken bones, was successfully transported to a Rochester, N.Y. animal hospital by SEG and New York City members. Thanks to their efforts, the patient has undergone surgery and is expected to make a full, four-legged recovery. Dogs who are sick, must be deemed physically able to make the trip by a vet and travel with written veterinary orders. All other pooches fly with documentation of immunizations, and to insure a smooth flight, often a favorite toy or blanket. For the best restraint and protection, dogs are placed in crates onboard the CAP planes.

For the CAP members involved, the rewards are numerous. “You really get the sense you have done something worthwhile when we take the dogs out of the crates inside the FBO,” says MP Nelson. “Everyone in the building comes over to pet the animals and you realize that you haven’t just saved them from a terrible fate. They are going to bring a lot of joy and happiness to someone.” Lt Al Vacchio, SEG Emergency Services Officer and PIC on the first December flight couldn’t agree more. Vacchio, who has flown multiple rescues for ARF over the years, actually ended up adopting one of his transports himself.” We were giving the dogs a break at the airport in between flights. I picked up this one dog and he immediately fell asleep in my arms. That was it for me. I flew back up to Orange County Airport in Montgomery, New York to the shelter the following week and brought him home.” It is about this time that Al pulls out his cell phone with a photo of the pooch he now calls his own. Without a doubt, you would be

hard-pressed to decide whose smile is broader. The dog in the picture. Or the man in the flight suit.

For more information on SEG Animal Rescue Flights contact:

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Pull Quotes: "The animals need to be rescued, we have the planes and the pilots who need to fly to keep their proficiency up– it's a win: win situation." Major Jill Silverman, Project Officer

"...you haven't just saved them from a terrible fate. They are going to bring a lot of joy and happiness to someone." Lt David Nelson



At Westchester County Airport (KHPN), CAP crew members Lt Al Vacchio, Maj Jill Silverman and Lt Janet Antonacci give boxer/lab mix puppies much needed attention before 19 December flight to Burlington, Vermont. Photo by Lt Janet Antonacci



Dogs are loaded into crates for flight to no-kill shelter in Burlington, Vermont on 31 December, CAP's second animal rescue flight. Photo by Lt Janet Antonacci



Maj Silverman and Lt Vacchio bring dogs to plane for second leg of rescue.
Photo by Lt Janet Antonacci



Maj Silverman carries pup and required immunization records to plane. Photo by Lt Janet Antonacci



Maj Silverman holds “Peggy Sue,” one of six dogs scheduled to be euthanized in South Carolina shelter before 31 December rescue flight. Photo by Lt Janet Antonacci



Lt Vacchio helps pup relax between flights. Photo by Lt Janet Antonacci



Lt. Vacchio and Maj Silverman transport dogs to plane. All dogs are crated for safety during flight. Photo by Lt Janet Antonacci