

Maryland resident places in national pet invention contest

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Glyndon, Md. - Brenda Cole, of Glyndon, Md., will soon see her idea on the shelves of pet stores nationwide after capturing third place in a national pet invention contest.

The PetSafe IdeaFetch contest saw more than 5,000 entries and was sponsored by PetSafe, a leader in the development of safe, reliable and technologically advanced pet products. Cole's product, the Home-Along Pet Fire Escape, is designed to provide a way for pets to escape in the event of a house fire.

"I've been concerned about my pet's safety in the event of a catastrophic house fire for some time," said Cole, who has been on self-imposed sabbatical from the business world since 2001. "I decided to put a little thought and effort into a product concept that could save my pet's life."

The Home-Along Pet Fire Escape works with any standard smoke detector to create a pet fire release system. Cole's idea proposes the placement of a wireless device on pet doors, crates or gate doors that would unlock and open the doors when a smoke alarm sounds.

According to Doug Grindstaff, PetSafe's vice president of new market development, Cole's idea, along with the other two winners, were chosen based on their production feasibility and adherence to PetSafe's mission to promote pet safety.

"With the example of Brenda, there was a lot of sensitivity around natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina. ... Consumers are looking for ways to locate their pet if lost or [to] escape the house if there is a fire," Grindstaff said. "Here you can protect your pet even if you're not home."

Gridstaff said the 5,000 entries were narrowed down to the top 100 by having consumers vote on the company's Web site. He said that more than 117,000 votes were entered. The top 100 were then pared down to the top three by a group of industry experts selected by the company.

The top three received cash prizes of \$40,000, \$5,000 and \$2,500, respectively, and all three products will be developed by PetSafe and launched at Petco stores nationally in spring 2007.

"I had an absolute blast brainstorming ideas for the contest and subsequently getting to know PetSafe," Cole said. "The process that I went through with this contest has reignited something in me that I thought was extinguished back in 2001 when I left corporate America."

The other winners

- » Jonathan Warren, of West Palm Beach, Fla., for the MicroID Collar
- » Gail Eicken, of New Jersey, for the Pet Fire Alert Collar

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