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MAKING KNOXVILLE THE MOST PET-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY IN AMERICA

Groups Come Together, Set Ambitious Goal

KNOXVILLE, Tenn.—A new effort is being launched to make Knoxville and Knox County the most pet friendly community in America. This impressive partnership brings together the City of Knoxville, Knox County, Young Williams Animal Center, the University of Tennessee, PetSafe, the Knoxville Area Chamber of Commerce and the Knoxville Tourism and Sports Corporation. The coalition has already set up a website, www.PetFriendliestCommunity.com, where people can get information and follow the effort.

“Ultimately being the most pet friendly community in America can offer great benefits to our citizens and it can also have a significant positive impact on local tourism,” said Knox County Mayor Mike Ragsdale.

“We deal with pet owners all across America every day,” said Randy Boyd, President of Knoxville-based Radio Systems Corporation, makers of the PetSafe brand. “We understand pets truly are part of the family. In fact, more than 30 percent of Americans travel with their pets and seek pet friendly activities and accommodations when planning vacations.”

This Pet Friendliest effort seeks to foster a culture of pet friendliness taken to the next level throughout our community by focusing specifically on the following: major expansion of pet activities and events, pet-focused tourism, and more pet-friendly park acres and businesses. Boyd said, “We are staking our claim that we are the most pet friendly community in America. I know others will challenge our claim, but we will have to defend it. To do so, we have to ask ourselves what someone in the most pet friendly community in America would do and then do it.”

Knoxville Mayor Bill Haslam said, “People love their pets and we are very supportive of this initiative that increases the number of pet friendly activities and locations in our community.”

Successful efforts of the Pet Friendly Community Committee have included the February Mardi Growl Parade hosted by the City of Knoxville and Young Williams Animal Center; the establishment of two community dog parks and planning for at least five more; and the identification of almost 3,000 pet-friendly hotel rooms in the community.

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The potential impact is huge. Studies show that more than 63% of American households, more than 71-million in all, own a pet. It can make a difference for tourism.

“We’re a family oriented destination,” said KTSC President Gloria Ray. “There’s no question that making our community more pet-friendly can help us appeal to more people.”

But the effort is about more than just making sure people and their pets are welcome. It’s also about controlling the pet population. Young-Williams Animal Center recently celebrated the 10,000th spay/neuter surgery on the Spay Shuttle, but realizes the needs to do even more. In fact an additional spay/neuter facility as well as a pet adoption center is being set up on Kingston Pike in the Bearden area. Construction is underway now.

“The efforts of this committee have given us a great opportunity to showcase what is good about this community and all that it does to help animals and pets. We are thrilled to be a part of the movement,” said Tim Adams from Young Williams Animal Center.

The business community is also stepping up and beginning to embrace the idea of being pet friendly. In fact, the website will feature an index of businesses who welcome pets and such businesses will be offered stickers to identify themselves. The Mast General Store downtown is a prime example. “Helping with small breed rescue, working with the Humane Society, and fundraising for the downtown dog park, Mast General loves to help out in these areas in any and every way we can,” said General Manager Mike Johnson. “We fully support the pet friendly initiative and are proud to be a part of it.”

“A great quality of life is an important factor in attracting and keeping businesses and skilled employees,” said Rhonda Rice, Executive Vice President of the Knoxville Chamber. “Certainly, a pet-friendly community adds to the accolades and quality of life that makes Knoxville attractive.”

“Well over half of the households in the U.S. have at least one pet. They bring us comfort, entertainment, laughter, and unconditional acceptance and love in an unsure world” says Dr. John New, Professor, UT College of Veterinary Medicine. “The Pet Friendliest effort is encouraging these benefits to be expanded to public spaces and the workplace, as well as private households.”

At PetSafe, employees are welcome to bring their pets to work. “It makes for a great work environment and I would encourage others to consider it as well,” said Boyd. “Our company may be focused on pet products, but I believe a policy like this can work for virtually any business.”