



APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 3, 2019.** Please include this application form with electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact Gage Harter.

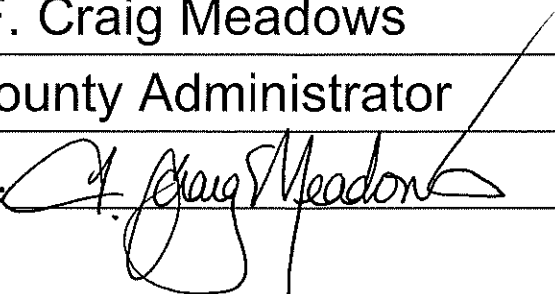
PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Montgomery County
Program Title: People's Choice Award
Program Category: Communications

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Jennifer T. Harris
Title: Public Information Director
Department: Public Information
Telephone: 540-381-6887 Website: www.montva.com
Email: harrisjt@montgomerycountyva.gov

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: F. Craig Meadows
Title: County Administrator
Signature: 

VACo Communications Submission – People’s Choice Award

Executive Summary:

In the fall of 2018, the Montgomery County Animal Care and Adoption Center (ACAC) received a \$5,000 grant from the Petco Foundation's Holiday Wishes Grant Campaign and was entered to win another prize for People's Choice Award in the amount of \$25,000. However, in order to win the additional prize, the community had to rally behind the ACAC and personally cast a vote on a designated website.

This is a true David v. Goliath story. The new ACAC, which just opened in April 2017, competed with organizations with admittedly far more heart-wrenching, allergy-inducing stories that could score votes. In addition, some of these organizations were located in large communities, some with populations in the millions (our county has fewer than 100,000 people). One group had 600,000+ followers on Facebook (compared to the ACAC's 6,000). Also, it should be noted that people were only allowed to cast a single vote for the duration of the competition. Our community members came through for us! Our vote total exceeded 7,000.

Overview

In the fall of 2018, the Montgomery County Animal Care and Adoption Center (ACAC) was notified that a story submitted to PetCo by an employee about the dog she had adopted from the ACAC had been chosen as a winner of a \$5,000 PetCo Foundation Holiday Wishes Grant. In addition, the ACAC was now in the running for additional grant money through the People's Choice Award. In the story shared by ACAC employee, Marilyn Wheaton, of her adopted dog, Ginny, she explained that she was inspired to choose a new career path in animal welfare, which led her from a volunteer with the then Montgomery County Animal Shelter to an employee. To read Marilyn and Ginny's story, visit www.petcofoundation.org/love-story/adopted-dog-inspires-college-student-to-work-in-animal-welfare.

With the knowledge of the opportunity to receive additional grant money in hand, the ACAC and Montgomery County's Public Information Office (PIO) set a goal to be one of the top five vote-getters in the nation for PetCo Foundation's Holiday Wishes People's Choice Award. If the ACAC placed in the top five, it would have the opportunity to receive a grant valued at \$5,000 and up to \$25,000. In order to reach the goal, the team needed to make sure all ACAC supporters were aware of the how they could help and where to vote. A modern day grassroots effort via social media was deemed the strongest approach in reaching the goal.

The target audience consisted of animal lovers in Montgomery County, Virginia, and their friends and family on social media who wanted to help the ACAC win additional grant funding from PetCo Foundation. The ACAC and PIO team specifically focused on the ACAC's Facebook page, which had just under 6,000 followers.

There was no planned budget for this social media push and the majority of the cost came from staff time/labor. Social media elements were produced in-house, including photos

(archives), graphics, and videos. Staff time for posting to Facebook is estimated at less than an hour total for the duration of the People's Choice Award voting (Nov. 16- Dec.19). Two people contributed to this effort. In addition, four videos were created (two Facebook Live, two edited). They took approximately four hours to produce. Aside from appearing on camera, one person completed all aspects of the work with an estimated labor cost of \$100.


The ACAC met its goal and then some! Initially, the ACAC and PIO team tried to maintain realistic expectations and were striving to be in the top-five list; however, once the voting started gain momentum, the team realized a higher place in the contest could be achieved. In the end, the ACAC won the TOP PRIZE of \$25,000. While there was some local media coverage, the bulk of this could not have been done without the social media efforts and the supportive community. The highest number of shares for a single post was over 700. That same post reached over 51,000 people!

This is a true David v. Goliath story. The new ACAC, which just opened in April 2017, competed with organizations with admittedly far more heart-wrenching, allergy-inducing stories that could score votes. In addition, some of these organizations were located in large communities, some with populations in the millions (our county has fewer than 100,000 people). One group had 600,000+ followers on Facebook (compared to the ACAC's 6,000). Also, it should be noted that people were only allowed to cast a single vote for the duration of the competition. Our community members came through for us! Our vote total exceeded 7,000. Following are nine pages of samples of items created for this campaign, that led to a \$25,000 grant thanks to our engaged community.

Selection of Facebook posts about the Holiday Wishes People's Choice Award

www.facebook.com/MC.Pet.Adoption

Initial posts about the People's Choice Award


**Montgomery County Animal Care and Adoption Center**

Like Page

Published by Montgomery Virginia · November 16 ·

We are so excited to announce that we are a winner of a Petco Foundation Holiday Wishes Grant! Our own Volunteer and Education Coordinator shared her story about the impact her adopted pup has made on her career path in animal welfare.

Check out their story and vote for us in the People's Choice Award. Please and thank you. <https://woobox.com/aogufx/gallery/5jp0fxM40>



WOOBX.COM

Montgomery County Animal Care's Photo

Adopted Dog Inspires College Student to Work in Animal WelfareAs a...

Get More Likes, Comments and Shares

Boost this post for \$30 to reach up to 19,000 people.

3,510

People Reached

686

Engagements

Boost Post

124

8 Comments 39 Shares

Like

Comment

Share

Performance for Your Post

3,510 People Reached

242 Reactions, Comments & Shares

133	89	44
Like	On Post	On Shares
51	36	15
Love	On Post	On Shares
1	0	1
Wow	On Post	On Shares
18	8	10
Comments	On Post	On Shares
39	39	0
Shares	On Post	On Shares
444		
Post Clicks		
2	176	266
Photo Views	Link Clicks	Other Clicks

NEGATIVE FEEDBACK


1 Hide Post

1 Hide All Posts

0 Report as Spam

0 Unlike Page


Reported stats may be delayed from what appears on posts

**Montgomery County Animal Care and Adoption Center**

Like Page

Published by Montgomery Virginia · November 19 at 8:53 AM ·

Please help us earn a \$25,000 grant from Petco Foundation! Vote for Marilyn's story in the Holiday Wishes People's Choice Award. The animals thank you. <https://woobox.com/aogufx/gallery/5jp0fxM40>



Get More Likes, Comments and Shares

Boost this post for \$30 to reach up to 19,000 people.

6,520

People Reached

1,341

Engagements

Boost Post

Robin Hummel Grove, Jess Mautone and 77 others · 12 Comments 79 Shares

Like

Comment

Share

Performance for Your Post

6,520 People Reached

287 Reactions, Comments & Shares

143	63	80
Like	On Post	On Shares
25	17	8
Love	On Post	On Shares
40	14	26
Comments	On Post	On Shares
79	79	0
Shares	On Post	On Shares
1,063		
Post Clicks		
75	402	586
Photo Views	Link Clicks	Other Clicks

NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

1 Hide Post

1 Hide All Posts

0 Report as Spam

0 Unlike Page

Reported stats may be delayed from what appears on posts

Breaking into the top five.

Montgomery County Animal Care and Adoption Center
Published by Marilyn Wheaton [?] · November 30 at 12:03 PM · 🌐

You guys are AWESOME! Not only did we break a thousand votes but we squeaked into 6th place! We are so excited and overwhelmed by our community support right now. Keep the momentum going, you are making a difference!

A	B	C	D
	Organization	# Votes	
	Greenville Huma	2347	
	German Shepher	2337	
	Voices of Change	2167	
	Cat Town Oaklan	2097	
	Front Street Anir	1277	
	Montgomery Co	1192	
	Upper Peninsula	1189	
	Ani-Care Animal	710	
	Oakland Animal	649	
	Lynchburg Huma	648	
	Pawfect Match R	558	
	Last Chance Arka	543	
	City Dogs Clevela	525	
	Saved by Grace A	452	
	Crash's Landind	378	
	South Hills Pet R	363	
	Maui Humane Sc	301	

3,968 People Reached 459 Engagements [Boost Post](#)

👍❤️ 39 2 Comments 35 Shares

Montgomery County Animal Care and Adoption Center
Published by Montgomery Virginia [?] · November 30 at 12:34 PM · 🌐

Your votes have launched us into 5th place! There's still a long time to go (voting is open until December 19th) but if you all keep up this pace together we can win another \$5,000-\$25,000 for the animals! We love our community so much and are always so overwhelmed by the amount of love you have for the critters.

Vote here: <https://woobox.com/aooguf/gallery/5pjp0fxM40>

	A	B	C
		Organization	# Votes
1		Greenville Huma	2347
2	R	German Shepher	2337
3	Q	Voices of Change	2167
4	ZY	Cat Town Oaklan	2097
5	I	Montgomery Co	1280
6	ZD	Front Street Anir	1277
7	O	Upper Peninsula	1201
8	ZW	Ani-Care Animal	711
9	A	Oakland Animal	649
10	ZH	Lynchburg Huma	648
11	ZA	Pawfect Match R	558
12	ZK	Last Chance Arka	543
13	Z	City Dogs Clevela	525
14	J	Saved by Grace A	452
15	ZO	Crash's Landind	378
16	L	South Hills Pet R	363
17	JP	Maui Humane Sc	301
18	ZB	Jasper County Ar	285
19	U	Kentucky Human	265
20	X		

16,645 People Reached 2,842 Engagements [Boost Post](#)

👍❤️🐾 Aubrey Dosky, Lori Bug and 143 others 23 Comments 241 Shares

Going from third to FIRST in a matter of hours with 18 days of voting remaining.

Montgomery County Animal Care and Adoption Center

Published by Marilyn Wheaton [?] · December 1 at 3:43 PM · 🌐

You all are AMAZING, we just hit 3rd place! This is incredible. If we can just keep the votes rolling and stay in the top five through December 19th we will earn up to \$25,000 for the shelter animals! Thank you so much to those of you have already voted, and if you still need to please visit <https://woobox.com/aogufx/gallery/5pjp0fixM40>

Performance for Your Post

25,759 People Reached

967 Reactions, Comments & Shares

386 Like	112 On Post	274 On Shares
99 Love	46 On Post	53 On Shares
7 Wow	6 On Post	1 On Shares
120 Comments	41 On Post	79 On Shares
355 Shares	353 On Post	2 On Shares

3,773 Post Clicks

252 Photo Views	1,103 Link Clicks	2,418 Other Clicks
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NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

8 Hide Post **0** Hide All Posts

0 Report as Spam **0** Unlike Page

Reported stats may be delayed from what appears on posts

Organization	# Votes
German Shepherd	2422
Greenville Human	2390
Montgomery Co	2242
Voices of Change	2241
Cat Town Oakland	2129
Upper Peninsula	1370
Front Street Animal	1278
Ani-Care Animal	722
Oakland Animal	663
Lynchburg Human	653
Pawfect Match R	562
Last Chance Ark	547
City Dogs Cleveland	537

Montgomery County Animal Care and Adoption Center

Published by Marilyn Wheaton [?] · December 1 at 5:39 PM · 🌐

You guys. YOU. GUYS. You have done it. We are in FIRST PLACE! I am in tears right now, I wish I could give every single one of you 2489 voters a hug. Your support is unbelievable. We still have to hold the lead through December 19th to win the \$25,000 but let's just take a second to appreciate what our community has achieved.

We are in first place because of you. YOU did this. YOU are fighting to help the homeless animals in our community. Thank you, thank you, THANK YOU!

Update: got so excited I forgot to add the link for those who want to vote! <https://woobox.com/aogufx/gallery/5pjp0fixM40>

Performance for Your Post

51,031 People Reached

2,689 Reactions, Comments & Shares

1,254 Like	444 On Post	810 On Shares
450 Love	267 On Post	183 On Shares
1 Haha	1 On Post	0 On Shares
25 Wow	19 On Post	6 On Shares
1 Angry	0 On Post	1 On Shares
250 Comments	116 On Post	134 On Shares
712 Shares	709 On Post	3 On Shares

9,740 Post Clicks

560 Photo Views	1,474 Link Clicks	7,706 Other Clicks
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NEGATIVE FEEDBACK


13 Hide Post **2** Hide All Posts

0 Report as Spam **0** Unlike Page

Reported stats may be delayed from what appears on posts

Organization	# Votes	
ZD	Montgomery Co	2489
Q	German Shepherd	2446
R	Greenville Human	2393
ZY	Voices of Change	2244
I	Cat Town Oakland	2131
ZW	Upper Peninsula	1370
O	Front Street Animal	1278
A	Ani-Care Animal	722
ZH	Oakland Animal	663

From Dec. 7-16, the ACAC took a break from posting about the Holiday Wishes grant due to the “Happy Paw-lidays” event the Center was hosting for the community on Dec. 15.



Montgomery County Animal Care and Adoption Center

Published by Marilyn Wheaton [?] · December 6 at 9:36 AM · 🌐

Grant update: We are still in first place but losing ground quickly!

Cat Town, who have 17,000 Facebook followers, jumped up from 5th place to 3rd in less than 24 hours. VOCAL got about 200 votes over night - their canine representative has over 30,000 Instagram followers. The German Shepherd rescue has a mind-boggling 655 THOUSAND Facebook followers and growing fast!

We may be small (5,500 Facebook followers) but we believe in the power of YOU! We have to hold first place ... See More

📶 Verizon 9:21 AM 80% 🔋

Performance for Your Post

41,317 People Reached

1,393 Reactions, Comments & Shares ⓘ

503 Like	141 On Post	362 On Shares
54 Love	18 On Post	36 On Shares
6 Wow	6 On Post	0 On Shares
1 Sad	0 On Post	1 On Shares
199 Comments	106 On Post	93 On Shares
629 Shares	629 On Post	0 On Shares

6,190 Post Clicks

411 Photo Views	1,091 Link Clicks ⓘ	4,688 Other Clicks ⓘ
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NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

8 Hide Post 2 Hide All

0 Report as Spam 0 Unlike Page

Reported stats may be delayed from what appears on posts

	B	C	D
1	Organization	# Votes	
2	Montgomery County	4474	
3	German Shepherd Res	2818	
4	Cat Town Oakland	2646	
5	Voices of Change Anir	2514	
6	Greenville Humane Sc	2430	
7	Upper Peninsula Anim	1521	
8	Front Street Animal Sl	1289	



Montgomery County Animal Care and Adoption Center

Published by Marilyn Wheaton [?] · December 16, 2018 at 1:34 PM · 🌐

Alright, folks, back to our regularly scheduled Holiday Wishes grant updates! With only three days to go we are still in the lead, but the groups just behind us have a much bigger following and are making serious moves to catch us. If you haven't voted already, please do so at <https://woobox.com/aogufx/gallery/5pjp0fxM40> - Let's hold on through this final countdown! We can do this!

📶 Verizon 1:29 PM 58% 🔋

Performance for Your Post

24,595 People Reached

750 Reactions, Comments & Shares ⓘ

272 Like	118 On Post	154 On Shares
47 Love	28 On Post	19 On Shares
1 Haha	0 On Post	1 On Shares
81 Comments	22 On Post	59 On Shares
350 Shares	338 On Post	12 On Shares

2,727 Post Clicks

226 Photo Views	623 Link Clicks ⓘ	1,878 Other Clicks ⓘ
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NEGATIVE FEEDBACK


6 Hide Post 2 Hide All Posts

0 Report as Spam 1 Unlike Page


Reported stats may be delayed from what appears on posts

	B	C	D
1	Organization	# Votes	
2	Montgomery County	5564	
3	German Shepherd Res	3436	
4	Voices of Change Anir	3345	
5	Cat Town Oakland	2979	
6	Front Street Animal Sl	2958	
7	Greenville Humane Sc	2557	
8	Upper Peninsula Anim	1893	


Social Media Videos and Graphics

**Montgomery County Animal Care and Adoption Center** was live.
Published by Montgomery Virginia · December 3, 2018 ·

Your vote will help the animals! <https://woobox.com/aogufx/gallery/5pjp0fixM40> sorry it's sideways!





05:22

 **Get More Likes, Comments and Shares**
Boost this post for \$30 to reach up to 34,000 people.





3,314
People Reached

400
Engagements

Boost Post

  47

3 Comments 16 Shares

 Like  Comment  Share 

Performance for Your Post

3,314 People Reached

1,295 Video Views

79 Reactions, Comments & Shares

49
Like

41
On Post

8
On Shares

8
Love


7
On Post

1
On Shares

5
Comments

4
On Post


1
On Shares

**Montgomery County Animal Care and Adoption Center**
Published by Montgomery Virginia · December 3, 2018 ·


This version of our Facebook live this morning won't force you to tilt your head like a curious kitty. (Sorry about that!)

Meet Ginny, the dog who impacted Marilyn's life, and take a look as we show you around the Center to see how your vote could help our animals.

Vote here: <https://woobox.com/aogufx/gallery/5pjp0fixM40>... See More





04:52

 **Get More Likes, Comments and Shares**
Boost this post for \$30 to reach up to 34,000 people.





4,902
People Reached

818
Engagements

Boost Post

  63

5 Comments 32 Shares

 Like  Comment  Share 

Performance for Your Post

4,902 People Reached

2,375 Video Views

196 Reactions, Comments & Shares

108
Like

47
On Post

61
On Shares

33
Love

16
On Post

17
On Shares

23
Comments

8
On Post

15
On Shares

33
Shares

32
On Post

1
On Shares

622 Post Clicks

94
Clicks to Play

72
Link Clicks

456
Other Clicks

NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

4 Hide Post

2 Hide All Posts


0 Report as Spam

0 Unlike Page

Reported stats may be delayed from what appears on posts

Oops! Our Dec. 3 Facebook Live was sideways but people still watched! We fixed it and reposted the video, viewable at <https://www.facebook.com/MC.Pet.Adoption/videos/2204510243202447/>

Bog, the talking Bearded Dragon, recorded a message. <https://www.facebook.com/MC.Pet.Adoption/videos/326681457939001/>

**Montgomery County Animal Care and Adoption Center**


Like Page

Published by Montgomery Virginia (?) · December 12 at 10:32 AM ·

Bog, the talking Bearded Dragon, has recorded a quick message for you.

There's just one more week before the voting closes in the Holiday Wishes People's Choice Award, where the Center could receive a \$25,000 grant from PetCo Foundation.

Vote for Ginny's story here - <https://woobox.com/aogufx/gallery/5pjp0fxM40>



Bog, the talking Bearded Dragon

00:08

7,383 People Reached

1,313 Engagements

Boost Unavailable

Like Love Haha Wow Comments Shares

123

21 Comments 71 Shares

Haha Comment Share

Performance for Your Post

7,383 People Reached

2,883 Video Views

299 Reactions, Comments & Shares

126 Like	80 On Post	46 On Shares
38 Love	27 On Post	11 On Shares
24 Haha	20 On Post	4 On Shares
1 Wow	0 On Post	1 On Shares
39 Comments	24 On Post	15 On Shares
72 Shares	71 On Post	1 On Shares

1,014 Post Clicks

146 Clicks to Play

111 Link Clicks

757

NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

3 Hide Post

0 Report as Spam


0 Hide All

0 Unlike Page

Reported stats may be delayed from what appears on posts

A last video push the night before the voting closed.

<https://www.facebook.com/MC.Pet.Adoption/videos/891674994557222/>

**Montgomery County Animal Care and Adoption Center**


Like Page

Published by Derley Aguilar (?) · December 18, 2018 at 8:47 PM ·

The last day to vote in the Petco Foundation's Holiday Wishes People's Choice award is Wednesday, Dec. 19. Your vote takes us a step closer to receiving a \$25,000 grant! If you haven't already done so, here is a link. <https://woobox.com/aogufx/gallery/5pjp0fxM40>

Thanks to all of our local community members--and beyond--for voting and continuing to support the animals in Montgomery County. To say you are amazing would be an understatement!

#MCPetAdoption



A vote for animals in our community time

00:37

7,833 People Reached

788 Engagements

Boost Post

Like Love Comments Shares

123

21 Comments 71 Shares

Haha Comment Share

Performance for Your Post

7,833 People Reached

2,630 Video Views

205 Reactions, Comments & Shares

85 Like	49 On Post	36 On Shares
28 Love	15 On Post	13 On Shares
7 Comments	3 On Post	4 On Shares
85 Shares	81 On Post	4 On Shares

583 Post Clicks

61 Clicks to Play

145 Link Clicks

377 Other Clicks

NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

1 Hide Post

0 Report as Spam


0 Hide All Posts

0 Unlike Page


Reported stats may be delayed from what appears on posts

The Final Countdown: Live on Facebook one minute before the voting closed.

<https://www.facebook.com/MC.Pet.Adoption/videos/738625129852124/>

**Montgomery County Animal Care and Adoption Center** was live.
Published by Montgomery Virginia (??) · December 19, 2018 at 12:59 PM · 🌐

It's the final countdown... and we are SWEATING! Thank you, everyone, for your support! 🐾🐾



19:06

✔ **Get More Likes, Comments and Shares**
Boost this post for \$30 to reach up to 34,000 people.

10,020 People Reached **2,157** Engagements [Boost Post](#)

👍❤️🐾 250 93 Comments 20 Shares

Performance for Your Post

10,020 People Reached

5,563 Video Views

547 Reactions, Comments & Shares ⓘ

179 Like	131 On Post	48 On Shares
251 Love	224 On Post	27 On Shares
7 Wow	7 On Post	0 On Shares
96 Comments	93 On Post	3 On Shares
22 Shares	20 On Post	2 On Shares

1,610 Post Clicks

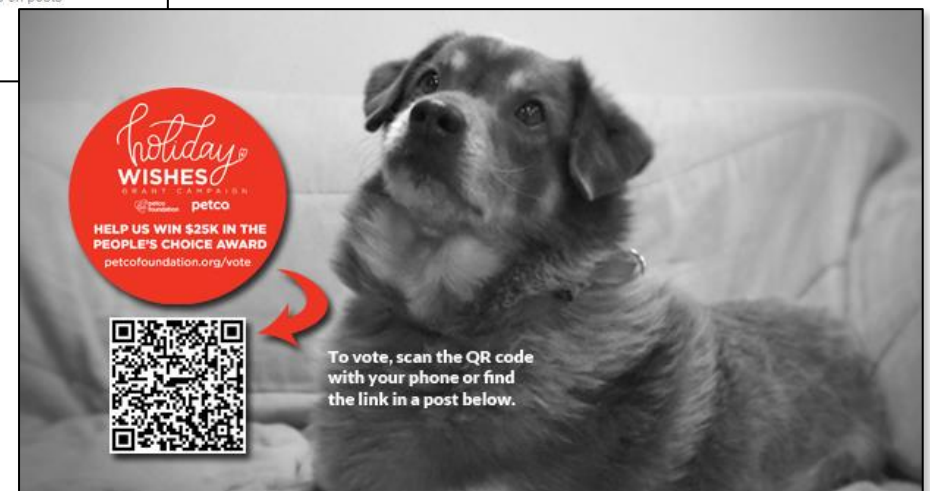
386 Clicks to Play ⓘ	0 Link Clicks ⓘ	1,224 Other Clicks ⓘ
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NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

7 Hide Post	2 Hide All Posts
0 Report as Spam	0 Unlike Page

Reported stats may be delayed from what appears on posts

Special Facebook cover image, featuring adoptable dog Jason, implemented mid-way through the voting.



This story was submitted and printed in a local newspaper on Dec. 26, 2018

<https://montcova.com/top-stories/petco-foundation-brings-animal-care-and-adoption-center-tidings-of-suspense-and-joy/>

Vying for \$25,000

“One minute left,” Marilyn Wheaton announced as she fanned herself with her hands.

The excitement *and* anxiety were palpable.

Even with a laptop on her legs, Wheaton’s knee bounced as she pulled statistics from a website to copy them into her trusty spreadsheet—a familiar practice, as she visited the site multiple times daily to check on vote totals and provide screen capture updates to those following the effort on social media.

“Are we on Facebook Live?!” she asked while looking into a cell phone camera. Yes, they were. “There’s only one minute left, you guys!” she screamed to the audience.

“7-3-3-4.... They are at 6-7-8-0,” Wheaton said, sharing the latest number of votes with the folks on Facebook and in the room.

Judge Doom, a black cat, rested comfortably while being cradled in the arms of Public Information Director Jennifer Tatum Harris, as she swayed left and right. He was the only one in the room who seemed somewhat calm. Fitting, when you’re the acting emotional support cat.

“Aaa! One o’clock!”

This was the moment everyone in Eileen Mahan’s office was anticipating. Mahan, the Director of the Animal Care and Adoption Center in Montgomery County, watched as Wheaton, Volunteer and Education Coordinator, delivered a play-by-play of vote totals. The current environment in her office easily could be likened to an election night: tallies, nervousness, sweaty hands, people popping in and out of the room for updates. The only major difference may have been the presence of the unsuitably named Judge Doom, and that this was not an election at all.

The initial excitement began a month prior when the ACAC landed a \$5,000 Holiday Wishes grant from the PetCo Foundation after Wheaton penned an essay about her dog Ginny’s impact on her life and career. That win put the Center in the running for a \$25,000 grant from the Foundation. The catch? It was a People’s Choice Award with web voting open for more than a month.

The Center’s main plea for votes was spurred by social media, but with less than 6,000 followers on Facebook, it was a bit of an underdog. One organization consistently in the top 5 vote-getting group had an astounding 600-thousand followers! This day, the closest competition was a Sacramento city shelter, Front Street, with more than 175-thousand followers.

Over the weekend, the Center’s first place standing, which it had earned and maintained since Dec. 1, was in jeopardy. Front Street closed in on the Center’s 2,000-vote lead, gaining over 1,000 votes overnight. As Front Street continued its push on social media, the lead began to shrink even further.

It was one o’clock, plus a handful of seconds. By this point, volunteer Marianne Walsh, Shelter Assistant Laura Cox, and a three-legged or “tri-pawed” Jack Russell pup named Roxie waited in Mahan’s doorway.

“Did we do it?” Wheaton asked, holding her hand to her cheek and staring at her laptop screen. Concern crossed her face as she questioned whether the voting was actually closed. The website appeared to accept additional votes but Wheaton’s laptop clock read 1:00. “Maybe it ends at one o’clock... minute?” The room erupted with laughter, a much needed moment of levity.

“I don’t know how to tell if voting is closed,” Wheaton said as she began searching for answers. As uncertainty filled the room, she tried voting for their neighbors to the east, Lynchburg Humane, to test the site. Those present offered theories for what was happening. Web browsers were refreshed. The things that used to be easy to remember became questions for Google. (When is noon CST, again?)

“Did we unofficially win?” Google couldn’t answer that question.

“I don’t know.”

“I think we unofficially won. Unofficially,” Wheaton said cautiously.

“I think we just declared ourselves as the winner,” Walsh affirmed.

“I don’t want to celebrate too hard.”

As the Public Information Director, Harris never fails to find the positive talking points. “Can we say that we *feel* like we won because of all the support?”

And, as if on cue, the community that had been there from the beginning chimed in. Multimedia Producer Derley Aguilar read a comment that popped up on the Facebook Live stream: “Gwendolyn Sewell says ‘I got a screen saying they’re validating votes!’”

The breaths from the sighs of relief could have inflated 10,000 balloons.

“Heather Foster confirms, ‘12 pm cst is 1 pm est. We win.’”

Well, that did it—unofficially, of course.

Hiding behind the cell phone the whole time, Aguilar thought she would be able to control the waterworks. She was wrong. And just like a contagious yawn in a room full of people, it spread. Wheaton’s knee bounces were replaced by tears of joy and celebratory giggles.

Mahan held it together in all the excitement and addressed the Facebook audience. “We could not have done this without this community. You guys are so amazing. To be able to compete against all of these other shelters nationally and huge cities like Sacramento and Oakland... and to be able to get this many votes for our community is just so amazing.”

Later that evening, the results were deemed official. The Montgomery County Animal Care and Adoption Center won the People’s Choice Award, a \$25,000 grant from PetCo Foundation!

Holiday Wishes do come true.