

Washington Animal Rescue League Collecting Food, Toys

Presents for Paws program provides holiday cheer to needy cats and dogs.

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Donations of cat food and toys will be given to needy pet owners through Presents for Paws. For nine years, the Washington Animal Rescue League has been brightening the holidays for low-income families and their needy cats and dogs. This year, the league continues its Presents for Paws tradition.

From now through Dec. 23, the group's holiday food and toy drive seeks to collect donations of unopened dry pet food, treats, new toys, dog sweaters, cat scratching pads and beds for cats and dogs. These items will get loaded into a van and be delivered to 200 pet guardians who sign up for the program in the Washington, D.C., metro area, said spokesman Jim Monsma.

With the worsening economy, there are more pet owners who could use the help this holiday season, Monsma said. "In the past, we have filled our lobby up with stuff. It's pretty impressive," he said.

The majority of the recipients are known to the league through its Medical Center, which provides low-cost veterinary care to income-qualified pet guardians.

"For over 90 years, the league has been working to support people who care for animals through affordable veterinary care and a variety of other programs," said Dr. Gary Weitzman, executive director. "People have always been very generous with their donations, and the recipients are always so grateful. This year, we know we are going to have to work a bit harder to meet the increased need."