

Nora the Piano-Playing Cat Honored

ASPCA names the musical feline Cat of the Year for upcoming Humane Awards Luncheon.

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Nora was named ASPCA Cat of the Year for showing that shelter animals often make the best pets. Photo: Burnell Yow
Ten remarkable animals and people, including Nora, the piano-playing cat, and a dog who helps a disabled veteran, will be honored for their heroic deeds Oct. 29 at this year's ASPCA Humane Awards Luncheon in New York City.

The event, to be held noon-2 p.m. at the Pierre Hotel, recognizes animal heroes who have made extraordinary efforts to impact the lives of animals during the past year.

"The ASPCA is proud to honor those who have demonstrated extraordinary compassion, bravery and commitment to furthering the human-animal bond," said ASPCA President and CEO Ed Sayres. "The Humane Awards celebrates the important role that animals play in our lives."

Among the 2009 ASPCA Humane Award winners are:

ASPCA Cat of the Year

When Betsy Alexander and Burnell Yow visited an animal shelter in Cherry Hill, N.J., they never imagined they would adopt a feline prodigy. Nora is a 5-year-old gray tabby whose special piano-playing skills quickly became a YouTube sensation, drawing more than 15 million page views and inspiring a Lithuanian composer to arrange a symphony in her honor. Nora is a talented example of how shelter pets — far from being castoffs — often make the best animal companions.

ASPCA Dog of the Year

Archie is an 8-year-old black Labrador retriever who serves as an assistance dog and social lifeline for Sgt. Clay Rankin. Rankin suffered spinal injuries while serving in Iraq, and Archie is his primary caregiver and social safety net. Archie's loyalty and perseverance in helping Rankin accomplish his daily tasks has allowed the veteran to regain his confidence and independence.

ASPCA "Tommy Monahan" Kid of the Year

Eleven-year-old Monica Plumb in Powhatan County, Va., decided to make a real difference after seeing a news story about a pet that was saved from a house fire due to the use of an oxygen pet mask. Monica launched PetMask.com to collect online donations to purchase pet masks for fire departments, and has since purchased more than 50 mask kits for fire stations in nine different states. (This award is dedicated to Tommy Monahan, a 9-year-old Staten Island boy who perished in 2007 trying to save his pet from a house fire.)

ASPCA Law Enforcement Officers of the Year

On July 8, 2009, the ASPCA participated in a massive dog-fighting raid, the largest federal crackdown on dog fighting in U.S. history. The raid spanned eight states, including Missouri, Illinois, Iowa, Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Nebraska and Mississippi, which resulted in the rescue of more than 400 dogs and nearly 30 arrests. The success of the raid was largely due to the efforts of Tim Rickey and Kyle Held of the Humane Society of Missouri (HSMO) and undercover agents Sgt. Terry Mills and Sgt. Jeffrey Heath of the Missouri Highway Patrol.