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Packing up a van with supplies for the Adams County Humane Society are Columbus Dog Connection volunteers (from left): Kellie DiFrischia of Worthington, with Murphy; Kim Ohlinger of Grove City, with Hattie; Terri Wolf of Clintonville, with Trevor; Tammy Miller of Blacklick, with Katie; and David Hague of Blacklick, with Rocky.

Group's work, packed van help canines in Ohio's poorest areas

Dogs at Adams County's humane society will benefit from Columbus Dog Connection's donations.

By MEREDITH SOMERS

Worthington News Reporter

As the boxes and bags of donated goods are loaded into the van, the volunteers know their generosity will not go unappreciated.

The gratitude may come in the form of a wagging tail or gentle lick on the hand, but the feeling will be just as genuine as a verbal reply.

This past weekend, Habitat for Dogmanity, a branch of Columbus Dog Connection, sent a van and its contents to Adams County in Southwestern Ohio. Filled to the sagging point with food, blankets, tennis balls and other toys and necessities, the van brings needed supplies and a few extra treats to canines at the humane society in one of the state's poorest counties.

"We've done different projects over the years," said Kellie DiFrischia, co-director of Columbus Dog Connection.

Elevated dog beds, new dog houses and reconstructed shelters all are mentioned on the extensive list provided by Columbus Dog Connection, which recognizes the contributions Habitat for Dogmanity has shared with dog shelters around the state.

This most recent endeavor to Adams County solidified about a week ago. With donations from local pet stores and grocery stores, as well as the help of Heidi's Homemade, an organic pet food company based in the Grandview Heights area, and BarkPark, a Powell-area dog park, DiFrischia's Worthington garage was filled to the brim with donated goods for the unfortunate four-legged friends down south.

David Hague and his wife Tammy Miller of Blacklick donated their minivan to the Adams County Humane Society. Not only will the van provide an easy transport for the donated items, but once empty,

the van can be used for moving dogs around the area — a job Hague has held for almost two years.

"It's like the Underground Railroad," Hague said. "The last 6,000 miles of this van have driven through Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Kentucky. We kept the van because of our golden retriever, and we've kept it to help other dogs, and it's going to live out the rest of its life helping dogs."

While Hague has racked up miles on his odometer for some time, the option of a canine rescue transportation system was not always an easy thing to come by, let alone a way to communicate the need for such a service.

"When I was new to Columbus, I was renting at the time, and I was only allowed a small dog," said DiFrischia. "I went to the pound and the humane society, but there were no small dogs."

She said she had no idea there were other options at rescue shelters because she had no

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idea places other than the pound and humane society existed. Eventually DiFrischia brought home Rocky, a bichon frise, from a pet store, and in May 1998, she helped launch the Columbus Dog Connection. Six months later, the organization's Web site would be up and running, with the distinction, DiFrischia said, of being the first of its kind in Central Ohio, with pictures and descriptions of adoptees.

Since then, the Columbus Dog Connection has joined forces with various shelters around the city, such as Ohio Pug Rescue. In a state whose number of puppy mills is ranked among the highest, the group's members have their work cut out for them, but DiFrischia said she is confident for the future

and knows she must rely on the help of others to get the hard and often heartbreaking tasks done.

"We could not do this if the community didn't pull together," DiFrischia said.

DiFrischia already is looking ahead at the next Columbus Dog Connection event. From 2 to 8 p.m. Aug. 25, Camp Mary Orton, 7925 N. High St., will play host to "Woofstock: Peace, Love and Drool." DiFrischia said dog owners are invited to hike, relax and socialize with their canine companions. A minimum donation of \$15 will be required for admission, and children 12 and younger will be admitted free.

For more information about adoption, donation or the Columbus Dog Connection, visit the Web site columbusdogconnection.com

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