

WASART Media Contact:
Michaela Eaves
Public Information Officer (PIO)
public-info@washingtonsart.org

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ALL-VOLUNTEER GROUP RESCUES PEOPLE BY HELPING ANIMALS

When your horse falls into a well, the people to call are the volunteers at WASART. When flooding forces people from their homes and land, WASART is trained to set up shelters for the pets and livestock of Western Washington and keep the animals safe so owners can take care of themselves.

The members of this all-volunteer run Washington State Animal Response Team train in some of the more difficult rescue areas. While some think of “animal rescue” as foster homes and adoption, WASART elevates “rescue” to the more difficult realm of “response”. Skills honed by many of the group members include swift water rescue, rope work and the use of pulleys and rappelling, animal assessment and handling, and long-term sheltering. Some members have even completed courses put on by Homeland Security, and the organization is considered part of FEMA.

Gretchen McCallum, J.D. and Greta Cook originally conceived of WASART in response to Hurricane Katrina. “A third of the people in New Orleans wouldn’t leave their homes when Katrina approached. A third of those people wouldn’t leave because they weren’t allowed to bring their pets with them,” said McCallum, currently serving as president of WASART. “We were determined not to let that happen here. Not in our state.”

WASART’s mission is two-fold: prepare the public to plan for their pets and livestock for large-scale disasters such as earthquakes and flooding, and help animals in dire situations, whether that be setting up a long-term shelter or rescuing a dog from a precarious position on a cliff.

The horse in the well? He and his much-relieved owners are doing fine.

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