



Animals Taiwan breeds help for needy

TRADITION: Game night fundraisers, which attract mostly expatriates who come for a night of fun, are an important source of income for the shelter, Liza Milne said

BY MEGGIE LU
STAFF REPORTER

Late into the night one Sunday last month, as people in Taiwan were bracing themselves for Typhoon Fung-wong, a group of about 200 expatriates gathered in a pub on Taipei's An-he Road to participate in a fundraising quiz night.

The group was summoned by Sean McCormack, a British native who founded Animals Taiwan (AT) three-and-a-half years ago.

The shelter, which gained non-governmental organization (NGO) status in June and hosts between 40 to 60 dogs depending on adoption rates, has served as a channel for expatriates to give back to Taiwan, which for some has been home for as much as 15 years.

"Originally, Sean was only hosting stray dogs in his own apartment in Taipei, until he got evicted from his residence," said Kim Phillips, the writer of the AT newsletter and an English lecturer at Chinese Culture University, who has been with the organization for two-and-a-half years.

One day, McCormack met Jane Goodall, the British primatologist, whose involvement in environmental and humanitarian affairs has

gained her international fame, during a visit in Taiwan. The meeting inspired him to set up his own animal shelter, Phillips, who comes from Canada, said.

But setting up AT has not always been a smooth ride, McCormack said. "Originally, a guy named Eric started the shelter with me, but he quit after a month; while 10 people showed up for the first monthly organization meeting. All of them quit within weeks," he said.

Money has also been a problem for AT, volunteers said.

The games nights, which attract mostly expatriates who come for a night of fun and to donate for a worthy cause, are an important source of income for the shelter, said Liza Milne, from Britain, who was the organization's treasurer until she handed the role over to a certified accountant after the AT became an NGO.

AT is sustained by donations, sponsorships, fees paid when people adopt an animal and fundraising events, such as a regular Sunday flea market run by Milne, she said.

"We pull in about NT\$200,000 a

month, which just breaks us even, since our basic expenditures [including salary for three local full-time staff and rent] is around NT\$160,000 per month. Depending on the number of animals in the shelter, we also need NT\$20,000 to NT\$30,000 for food," she said.

Some months, when AT gets an injured or sick animal, medical expenditures are also added to the operating costs, she said.

The situation can get even worse, as "unlike some animal shelters, we don't kill our animals except on very rare occasions," Phillips said. "So some dogs live in AT for years."

The tradition started with AT's very first rescue, which involved a mutt named Lazarus, whose life was hanging on a thread from a long list of medical problems. McCormack was the one who found it.

"Lazarus [the name of a man in the Bible who was raised from the dead by Jesus] was a complete mess when we found him. You can see pictures of him on our Web site [animalstaiwan.org/rescues.htm]. But by the time he got out and found an owner, he was happy,

"Some people are changing their way of interacting with their pets and are beginning to treat them like family."

— Sean McCormack, founder of Animals Taiwan

energetic and loving," he said.

In the three years that AT has been in operation, only eight dogs have been put down, McCormack said.

"Even for animals that are blind or have only two legs, as long as there is life in their eyes, we would give them a try because it is not our job to take away their desire to live. We have always been amazed by their recoveries," he said.

As such, aside from the full-time staff, all AT participants are strictly volunteers, said Peter Dearman, AT's Webmaster, who is also an English teacher from Canada.

Another problem AT has faced is public ignorance of animals, Phillips said.

"Some people too freely dump

their dogs because the puppies turned into dogs and are not cute anymore, or because their pets behave badly, or because it is not convenient for them to keep dogs anymore," she said.

The situation is especially prevalent in pure breeds, where owners expect to have "perfect dogs, without behavioral problems even with no training," McCormack said. "Which is just like dumping dogs out of the owners' own stupidity and ignorance, because no dog would behave without proper training and training them is the responsibility of the owners."

While AT volunteers all agree that Taiwan has come a long way in the past decade, they also say that a lot remains to be done.

"You don't see caged animals as much. Some people are changing their way of interacting with their pets and are beginning to treat them like family. If anything, some people are starting to baby their dogs, which may not necessarily be a good thing if it is too extreme," McCormack said.

However, "there is always going to be stray or mistreated dogs," Phillips said.

To combat the problem, education is key, she said.

"One of future key focuses of AT [will be] to run an educational program that teaches the public

compassion for animals, as well as how to care for and train them," she said, adding that the program — which she heads — will be launched sometime this month.

On the Internet, AT is also compiling its own "Wikipedia" on dog-care and training, Dearman said, adding that anyone can edit or add to it. Another vital part of the education program is a neutering campaign, where AT aims to promote the importance of neutering pets as well as strays so that the stray problem can be mitigated, Milne said.

With AT gaining NGO status, the volunteers are expecting bigger funding and greater involvement for the organization.

"As an NGO, we can now apply for governmental funding, receive money from international charities, as well as get corporate sponsorship," McCormack said.

From 15 dogs crammed in a small apartment to a certified NGO with a full-size shelter, McCormack has come a long way in his work with animals in Taiwan. Asked why he stuck to the cause, McCormack said: "I have always liked and felt dedicated to animals and I want to see a change in Taiwan."

"Whenever you feel like quitting, it is a test of whether you are going to succeed [in your pursuit] or not, those that give up do not succeed," he said.



Participants join an African drumming lesson on the second annual South African National Women's Day celebration held in Taipei on Friday.

PHOTO: JENNY W. HSU, TAIPEI TIMES

S African women's day event addresses lingering problems

UNITED: Women's rights activist Gertrude Fester encouraged the attendees to empower themselves through education

BY JENNY W. HSU
STAFF REPORTER

Around 100 women from various countries gathered in Taipei on Friday to celebrate South Africa's National Women's Day.

Ida Meyer, the wife of the South African representative to Taiwan, said that 52 years ago on Aug. 8, women from all walks of life in South Africa protested against a law that discriminated against women.

"Women then showed that they are a power to be reckoned with and that if united, women can achieve results," she said.

Each participant was given a traditional drum, and with the help of some African drummers, the participants were able to improvise melodic beats.

The organizer said the exercise was meant to demonstrate the power of unity when women around the world are willing to stand together.

South African women's rights activist Gertrude Fester encouraged the attendees to empower themselves through education.

But Fester also told the Taipei Times that Taiwanese women had been distanced from the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and other international protocols because Taiwan is not a member of the UN.

She suggested that Taiwanese women should still learn from and apply the principles of the convention despite a lack of formal participation.

"It is unfair that Taiwanese women are not included in the [convention], but they should not be paralyzed by the politics," she said.

PIGEON POST

Workshops at the Center

The Community Services Center is hosting two workshops this month on topics including cultural adjustment, parenting and recognizing signs of stress. The workshops will include interactive discussions on adjusting to life in another country with longer-term expatriates. They will also provide an opportunity to meet the Center's counselors. The first workshop will be held next Tuesday, Aug. 19, from 6pm to 7:30pm and the second two days later, Thursday, Aug. 21, from 11am to 12:30pm in Shilin (士林), Taipei City. The workshops are free of charge and refreshments will be provided. For more information or to register, call (02) 2836-8134 or go to www.community.com.tw.

Performance academy back in town

The American Performing Arts Academy in Taipei is back by popular demand to teach budding performers. A hip-hop and piano academy started on Sunday and finishes on Friday, with a student concert to be held on the final day. Students in the Broadway Musical course will attend classes from this Saturday to the following Saturday, also including a performance on the final day. Apart from learning the latest dance moves, hip-hop students are being taught how to maintain stamina and poise. Broadway musical students will learn acting skills and stage movement, while piano students are learning about American composers such as Gershwin and Samuel Barber. All concerts are free. For details, see apaa.tmu.edu.tw/EnglishFrameset.html.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF APAA

STAFF WRITERS



ROYAL TREATMENT

Thai singer Chaiya Mitchai, center, well known in Thailand for his folk performances, sings on Sunday at Taoyuan County Stadium to more than 10,000 attendees at an event held to celebrate Her Majesty Queen Smitikrit of Thailand's birthday today.

PHOTO: LEE CHING-SUNG, TAIPEI TIMES

An Italian matchmaker eyes Taipei and Rome

POTENTIAL: Mario Palma, head of the Italian government's trade and cultural office, says Italians can help Taiwanese learn a thing or two about the good life

BY JENNY W. HSU
STAFF REPORTER

Mario Palma asked to be stationed in Taiwan because he wanted to be a matchmaker between Taipei and Rome.

"The potential for further cooperation between the two countries is huge," said the head of the Italian Economic, Trade and Cultural Promotion Office.

He said that in spite of the absence of formal diplomatic ties since 1970, Taiwan and Italy share many interests and passions: fine art, design and even good food.

With a traditional Chinese red-wood table juxtaposed against a contemporary plush sofa, even Palma's office furniture exemplifies a kind of romance between Oriental and Occidental cultures.

It was Taiwan's maturing democracy and historic transformations that had prompted his request for a posting in Taipei, Palma said.

"I asked to come here because I thought it would be the right moment to be in Taiwan," he said. "It was just some months ahead of the legislative and the presidential elections. The mood was already that the Taiwanese political scene

was about to have some historic changes. But what we could not have imagined was the dimension of the change."

It was striking, he said, to witness how Taiwanese voters took the fate of the country into their hands.

"It was the voters that wanted the change and they got it," he said.

Although Palma has been Italy's representative for less than a year,

he is not a stranger to the country. In 1996, Palma spent one month in Taipei studying traditional Chinese characters after mastering the spoken language in Beijing.

"At the time, I could not have imagined that I would come back to Taiwan as the representative," Palma said, recalling the fond memories of traveling with Amis Aborigines on an excursion to Hualien County, as well as a trip to Sun Moon Lake (日月潭).

Now, as the voice of the Italian government in Taiwan, Palma said his goal was to promote cultural, economic and trade relations and to help his countrymen gain a better understanding of the "vibrancy of Taiwanese society."

Citing Gianfranco Lanci, the president of the Taiwanese computer giant Acer, as an example of a company successfully merging Italian-style management and Taiwanese innovation, Palma said the potential for closer collaboration and exchange between the two countries is immense.

Taiwan, he noted, has an advanced research and development sector that Italians can learn from. In the other direction, Taiwan can look to Italians for ideas in art and design.

In conjunction with the Xue Xue Institute, Palma's office is a sponsor for "Italian Genius, Now," a series of lectures by leading names in the fashion industry, including Sergio Fintoni, senior consultant at the Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci. The Italian trade and cultural office is also screening two movies at the upcoming European Film Festival in Taipei to highlight Italian cinematography, he said.

Palma said the innovations of Taiwanese artists and architects were gaining more acclaim.

For example, a display entitled "Taiwan: the Interbreeding Field,"

organized by the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, will be featured next month in Venice in the 11th International Architecture Exhibition's main hall, instead of the side halls as in the past.

As Italians prepare to explore the work of Taiwanese architects, some are hoping Taiwanese will explore their wine.

Italian wine, Palma said, has a larger number of varieties than French wine because of the different types of grapes that are grown in Italy.

Barolo, Soave and Primitivo wines, to name just a few, have gained popularity among Taiwanese

wine aficionados, Palma said, adding that Italian wine imports have increased by 80 percent since last year.

Palma said Rome is happy to see warming relations between Taiwan and China, adding that stability in the Taiwan Strait is in the interests of the EU, which adheres to the "one China" policy but supports Taiwan's participation in international organizations.

Below: Mario Palma, head of the Italian Economic, Trade and Cultural Promotion Office, gestures during an interview with the Taipei Times on July 10.

PHOTO: CHU PEI-HSIUNG, TAIPEI TIMES



Why do cheap, second-rate commercials interrupt my TV programs and commercials?

A-hok says:

The National Communications Commission says a cable service provider is entitled to broadcast commercials for local companies based on contracts it makes with the operators of satellite television channels. The contract states the amount of time allowed for local commercials, but some cable service providers fail to follow the terms of the contract and exceed ad limits. Sometimes this results in ads that overlap with programming or that cut off broadcasts before they reach the ad break. Other times it is simply a problem of incredibly slapdash timing. Disgruntled viewers can file complaints against cable service providers. Now that the Cable Television Law (有線電視法) has delegated industry regulation to local governments, you can contact them to take the matter further. Better still, present some recorded evidence to your local information and tourism department. Punishment for cable providers ranges from a warning to a fine of NT\$1 million (US\$30,000). The authorities can't help you with the quality of the ads themselves, of course.



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