

Oxygen masks will help pets breathe a little easier



Photo : Terra Ciolfe

Julia Micallef, 3, gets a sled ride from Brodie during Snowfest in Caledon Village on Family Day. Good Guys Carting, a group of dog owners who train their dogs to cart, were giving kids sled rides to raise money to buy pet respiration equipment for local fire stations.

Caledon Enterprise by Terra Ciolfe

Family pets in Caledon just got a little safer thanks to a donation to the local fire department.

Caledon Fire and Emergency Services is now equipped with pet oxygen masks – smaller masks specifically designed for animals exposed to smoke during a fire.

“[We’re] really grateful for the donation,” said Fire Chief Terry Irwin. “Our prime objective is to rescue people from the house. But we also understand that pets are a very important part of the family.”

Before, Caledon firefighters would use human masks on the animal if a family pet needed oxygen.

In many cases it has worked, but it isn’t very “efficient,” according to Irwin. The human masks don’t fit the animals properly and a lot of the oxygen gets wasted.

The pet masks are designed to fit onto the different sizes of animals and will create a “tighter seal” on the animal.

Over the years, Irwin has seen several pets lost to house fires and witnessed the impact it has on families.

“The families get out and they may lose their possessions, but when they lose a family pet, it’s extremely difficult for them and extremely traumatic,” he said. “[The donation] makes the firefighters feel better equipped to provide that kind of service to the citizens.”

In total, 20 sets of pet oxygen masks were donated to the Town’s fire department – one for each truck.

Good Guys Carting Dogs, a group of dog owners who train their dogs to pull carts, donated 14 masks, with the help of the Caledon Agricultural Society, Dr. Helen Wicki and Nobleton Veterinary Clinic and longtime Caledon residents, Mr. and Mrs. Goodfellow.

“I hope they never have to use this equipment, but in the event that there is an emergency and the animal is in stress, it’s nice to know they are going to have it to use and hopefully save the animal’s life,” said Ross Hamilton, a member of Good Guys Carting Dogs.

Good Guy Carting Dogs raised money for the donations during last two Snowfest events held in Caledon Village on Family Day. Members of the group, along with their trained carting dogs, gave kids rides in exchange for a \$2 donation, which went to the purchase of the pet oxygen masks.

Ross presented the 14 masks to Irwin and the fire department during this year’s Snowfest on Feb. 18.

The Cheltenham Veterinary Clinic, in partnership with Invisible Fence Brand, a company that installs invisible pet fences, teamed up to donate the additional six pet oxygen masks needed to fully equip the local fire stations.

“In the event of a fire, pets are often in need of emergency assistance before veterinary care can be accessed,” said Dr. David Kirkham of Cheltenham Veterinary Centre in Caledon. “Now that the Town of Caledon Fire and Emergency Services has these masks on hand, our community is better equipped with the tools that can help save a pet’s life during this type of emergency situation.”

For Kirkham, it is also a personal mission. His uncle, who he said is like a father to him, became a firefighter the day he was born and has served ever since. So, he said, he’s always been looking for something to do to tie the two together.

“It combines my admiration for their profession and the love and passion I have for my own,” he said about the program. Kirkham is also donating his time to help train the firefighters in each station.

They just need a little reassurance and some animal handling technique that could help in a tense situation, said Kirkham.

Each pet oxygen mask kit contains three different sized reusable masks for various sized animals.

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