

# Central California SPCA wins \$100,000 grant for animal-saving effort (video) | Local News

By Andrea Castillo

Central California SPCA won the Grand Prize in the ASPCA Rachael Ray 100K Challenge. Video: John Walker/The Fresno Bee THEFRESNOBEE

The [Central California SPCA](#) found homes for 2,640 animals between June and August during a national challenge for grant funding, winning the top prize of \$100,000.

Fifty animal shelters competed against each other during the 2014 [ASPCA Rachael Ray \\$100K Challenge](#), including \$550,000 in total grants. City of Stockton Animal Services, which partnered with San Francisco SPCA, placed second by saving 2,516 animals — an increase of 1,533 over last year — and won \$30,000. Other agencies won prizes ranging from \$5,000 to \$25,000.

Fresno saw an increase of more than 1,612 adoptions over the same three-month period last year. Together, the 50 shelters nationwide found homes for 68,805 dogs and cats during the contest, a collective increase of 16,789 over last year.

This was the first year since the challenge started in 2010 that Fresno has participated. CCSPCA spokesman Walter Salvari said the grant will help reduce adoption fees during the winter. Adoptions normally cost \$180 for puppies up to 5 years old and \$120 for older dogs, but from Black Friday through the end of the year they will be \$25 across the board.

The CCSPCA operates with an annual budget of about \$6.2 million, including \$3 million in donations and \$3.2 million from the city of Fresno. Last year the organization offered the same winter adoption discount and saved about 750 animals, Salvari said. He said it cost about \$100,000 to make up the fee difference.

Salvari said it's important to understand how much it takes to operate an animal shelter. The CCSPCA is known for having a high euthanasia rate. He said the public constantly hounds shelter leaders for killing healthy dogs and cats due to time or space issues, but it costs a lot of money to achieve that.

One of the shelter's most significant accomplishments during the challenge is not having euthanized any healthy animals. Salvari said the shelter typically puts 1,400 sick and healthy dogs and cats to sleep each month. But between June and August, about 1,200 healthy animals were transferred or adopted instead.

Executive Director Linda Van Kirk said she remembers shaking as she hit the send button on the challenge application.

"I'm a firm believer in intuition and in gut feelings," she told a cheering crowd of supporters. "And my intuition told me we're going to win the challenge. I was so ecstatic, I was so nervous and you know what? My intuition, she never lies."

One of the most joyous moments, Van Kirk said, was witnessing empty cages. The sight brought many shelter employees to tears, she said.

Bert Troughton, vice president of strategic initiatives for the ASPCA, announced the award Tuesday at the CCSPCA training yard on South Hughes Avenue. Queen's "We are the champions" blared from the speakers as she told local shelter leaders they had won.

“You learned that when you ask your community to help you and help animals, they will respond,” she said.

Troughton called the challenge a new beginning, saying there’s no going back now that local leaders have learned what it takes to get more cats and dogs adopted.

Part of what made the Fresno shelter so successful was reaching out to animal lovers on social media. Peter Lang of Uhuru Network was part of the team that crafted the CCSPCA’s digital marketing strategy, including aggressive outreach on Facebook, Twitter and their blog. They tracked the activity by promoting the hashtags #100kChallenge #SaveALifeFresno.

On average, Lang said, each animal photo would get 200 shares and 300 likes. Eventually, someone would comment saying, “I’m coming to pick up that animal,” he said.

The shelter also recruited additional volunteers through the challenge. Josie Clark, of Fresno has volunteered there since she retired in 2012. The 63-year-old said the efforts of volunteers make a big difference but the shelter needs more.

“We fill in the gaps,” she said.

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