

MAKE A DIFFERENCE WITH OUR SMALLER FRIENDS.....

Over the past couple of years of foreclosures being the sad part of our lives, an even sadder group of victims has emerged in the wake of such devastation. Family pets have been left behind out of desperation or indifference, but whatever the reason, the animals need our help.

It is hard for most of us who love animals to even imagine leaving our pets behind, but before we can attempt to do something about it, it is important to recognize the signs that it is about to happen right under our noses.

Homes that are lost through foreclosure happen for several reasons including but not limited to, unemployment, chemical dependence, uncontrolled credit card debt, disability, divorce or dissolution of partnership. The circumstances that lead to foreclosure do not happen over night, but rather over a long period of time and trouble. Distressed and depressed homeowners, who in better days may always have considered the welfare of their pets, are almost as helpless as the pets they now abandon.

Before a home is foreclosed upon, there are often many signs of that pending foreclosure that neighbors, friends or family members can see including the publication of the address and data in the newspapers as is required by law. Some of the signs of a distressed property include lack of upkeep of the interior, exterior and landscaping. If you know that there is a pet (or pets) in the home, and the family will be moving out, know that it is likely that the individuals will be renting. Most rental properties do not permit pets.

Sometimes the troubled homeowner is so overwhelmed that gathering information to make a decision about the pet gets lost in the chaos. Your intervention before the move can make all the difference in the world to an animal. It may be as simple as asking what plans have been made for the pet. If they have no idea what to do, they may be very grateful to learn from you about the animal welfare agency that is located a few miles away. You may also offer to make that phone call for them to be sure the animal has a chance to be adopted by another loving family in time. If you are uncomfortable approaching the homeowner for fear of offending, erring on the side of kindness to the animal by at least providing rescue agency literature to the homeowner is a good start.

Communities have Animal Control Officers and Humane Societies that can provide contact information to help these animals before they end up on the street or worse. If you see an animal roaming the streets unattended, or "hanging out" around a foreclosed home, please make that call to the authorities. Sometimes we walk right by an abandoned pet and we never even realize it.

Realtors are in the unique position of seeing first hand what can happen to animals in a distressed property situation. Embroiled in a bitter divorce and facing foreclosure, "John" thought that "Mary" had notified the Dog Officer about having the dog picked up when the moving truck left. The animal had been tied in the back yard. John was mistaken. The neighbors heard the dog barking for what seemed like too long a time and help did arrive.

I remember a similar situation where pet rabbits had been abandoned.....in their cage inside the empty house. Each separating spouse blamed the other for the

neglect. Luckily a Realtor found the dehydrated and starving animals in time to save them when she went to evaluate the property. I will not soon forget her anguish and her anger.

These may be hard times, but we can help each other if we keep our eyes open for those who can not help themselves. If you are in a position to provide information to the pet owners before the animal may be abandoned, you may have saved the animal from terrible hardship. If you suspect that an abandoned pet may have been left in or around a home, please make the call to the local Animal Control Officer and report your suspicions.

The new wave of foreclosures will start within a few months and all communities will feel the effects one way or another. We really can make a difference by paying attention to our surroundings so that the only effect the animals will feel is the same love they provide to all of us unconditionally.

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