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NON-PROFIT DELIVERS VALENTINES TO OVER 12,000 CHAINED DOGS

Unusual direct mail campaign teaches school children, dog caretakers about the inhumanity of keeping a dog as a prisoner in the yard

February 25, 2009 – Tipton, PA. – Dogs Deserve Better, the only non-profit focused exclusively on ending the suffering endured by dogs that spend their lives on chains or in pens, recently wrapped up an unusual direct mail campaign whereby 12,113 Valentines, most of which were made by school children, were delivered to chained and caged dogs across the United States.

Annually endeavoring to send more Valentines than the prior year, Dogs Deserve Better surpassed its 2008 record by 1,678.

The 7-year-old “Have a Heart for Chained Dogs” campaign is designed to educate dog caretakers about the inhumanity of staking a dog in the yard and leaving it there for years on end, often for the dog’s entire life. Perpetual chaining is legal in most places in the United States and is widely accepted in certain areas.

Dogs Deserve Better, through its nationwide volunteers, starts every Valentines campaign by canvassing neighborhoods to gather the addresses of thousands of chained dogs. Included with the Valentines are coupons for dog treats and educational materials for the dogs’ caretakers. The messages in the handmade Valentines reflect the inherent affinity most children have for animals and the understanding that dogs deserve more than a muddy patch in the backyard. “Break the chain this Valentine’s Day” and “Show me some puppy love” were among the typical messages in the cards.

The Valentine campaign is unusual because it provides educational opportunities not only for the recipients of the Valentines, but also the children who make them. As one teacher from West Virginia reported: “These Valentines are from my children at TA Lowery Elementary School in Jefferson County, West Virginia. They read “Puddles on the Floor” [a story about a chained Beagle, illustrated by Dogs Deserve Better founder Tamira Ci Thayne] and were truly brought to tears at some moments in the story. It has really opened some eyes, as some families [in our school] keep their dogs outside.”

Over the years, many dogs have been relinquished to Dogs Deserve Better as a result of the direct mail outreach. A message from one recipient this year is typical: “I received a Valentine regarding our dog being on a chain. My husband got this dog for our 4-year-old, who immediately did not like her....My husband was laid off work in December, and I work a low-paying job while looking for something better. If someone does not take her soon, I will take her to the local animal shelter.”

Other recipients have requested Dogs Deserve Better’s help in providing free or low-cost fencing in exchange for releasing their dogs from their chains.

“We get tremendous results from this outreach,” said Tamira Ci Thayne, founder and director of the Tipton, Pennsylvania-based Dogs Deserve Better. “Of course not everyone agrees to let their dogs off chains and many people react defensively, but once people are given information that calls into question the barbaric practice of keeping a dog as a constant prisoner, then they often reconsider what is really just an archaic habit, a passive and negligent way of confining a dog.”

Millions of “backyard dogs” in the United States live without exercise, companionship, or any respite from life-threatening extremes in weather. A dog kept chained alone in one spot suffers immense psychological and physical damage. A once- friendly animal becomes neurotic, depressed, anxious, and often aggressive, thereby posing a danger

to people. Chains wrapped around trees or debris can strangle dogs or limit movement so severely they cannot access food and water, assuming food and water is even provided regularly. Some chained dogs end up with collars embedded in their necks, the result of years of neglect at the end of a chain.

The Have a Heart for Chained Dogs campaign is just one of several creative and provocative educational outreaches that Dogs Deserve Better engages in every year. During the week of July 4, the group will again hold its annual "Chain Off" during which volunteers will chain themselves to dog houses in public places across the United States.

For more information: www.dogsdeservebetter.org