

## Pet of the Month

**Calendar fundraiser nets thousands of dollars for small-town shelter each year**

BY JIM BAKER

**Everyone thinks their pet is**, without doubt, the cutest pet in the world.

And, given a chance to prove it, pet owners will go to almost any length to come out on top.

Rik and Lyn Meyers use that competitive spirit to drive the annual fundraiser that they put together for the Headwaters Animal Shelter in Park Rapids, Minn.

The couple, along with a few other volunteers, donate their time and skills to create a slick, professionally designed calendar full of photos submitted by pet owners who want to show everyone just how cute their favorite companions are. Anyone can enter photos of their pet; typically, some of the dogs and cats featured are rescue pets. Some are even former residents of the Park Rapids shelter.



The cover of the 2012 fundraiser calendar features four American Samoyeds, two of whom belong to Rik and Lyn Meyers, the lead volunteers for the annual project. Daisy the 6-year-old Westie graces the month of July in the 2012 pet calendar.

By voting online, at 25 cents per vote, people can push their pets—or the pets of friends and family—up the chart, upping the odds that the animal will make it big in the calendar. People can vote for any pet photo they want to, and as many times as they want to. “The last-minute voting can get a little intense, as people try to ‘buy their way’ onto the cover, or to move their pet up the list, so that it’s one of the top 13 photos, and their pet becomes a calendar model,” Rik says.

The couple promote the voting and the calendar by posting fliers around the community, sending out press releases to local newspapers, and emailing shelter supporters along with everyone who’s ever submitted a photo or bought a calendar.

As the voting deadline nears, many folks go online to check vote tallies, then vote like mad for their own photos. Some drop hundreds of dollars to try to secure the calendar’s cover shot or one of the 12 big slots for each month. Photos that don’t get enough votes for those prime spots are run smaller on the last spread of the calendar, so everyone’s pet gets in.

The 2012 calendar, which was distributed in October, sold out—all 350 copies, at \$13 apiece (a few were discounted to \$11 at the end). It costs \$5 to submit a photo; entry fees brought in \$390. Sales raised \$3,620, and sales of ads in the calendar amounted to \$3,100. And the votes of everyone who participated came to \$4,600. Overall, the profit on this year’s calendar totaled \$9,391, according to Rik. Not a bad haul for a little shelter in a town of fewer than 4,000.

The first calendar came out in 2008. It was a successful fundraiser, but Rik and Lyn felt that with their backgrounds—Rik retired after 30 years the field, where he was a creative director and partner in an agency; Lyn after many years as a media director at another ad agency—they could give future calendars an even more appealing look. They volunteered to take over and have been pro-



Rik and Lyn Meyers, with their dogs Nala and Lika, collect votes for pet photos submitted for a fundraising calendar to support Headwaters Animal Shelter in Park Rapids, Minn.

ducing the calendars since 2009, with help from Flip Namur, a graphic designer from Minneapolis who Rik knew from his years in advertising. “[Flip] doesn’t even know the shelter, and yet he volunteers his time and expertise to do everything for us,” Rik says. “The voting results are higher, and the sales of calendars are higher. We’ve increased the profits about \$1,000 every year.”

Shelter board member Stephanie Hafner sells advertising for the calendar; there are four small ads at the bottom of each month. And Mary Aho, board treasurer, manages the online voting, uploads submitted photos to the website, and handles the PayPal and credit card payments for votes. Then they submit everything to Gordon Bernard Company, which specializes in printing community fundraising calendars.

The shelter has a big launch party in late October, where people can buy the calendars (plus everything from T-shirts to homemade dog biscuits).

“We just look for every single opportunity to squeeze some money” out of this fundraiser, Rik says.

And Rochelle Hamp, shelter manager, doesn’t have a problem with that. “This is the only place where it’s OK to stuff the ballot box,” she says, laughing. **AS**