

Holiday becomes dog rescue project

MARGARET HAYLOCK-CAPON
THE COUNTY

A Picton couple went to the dogs, while vacationing in Mexico. When Willem and Donna Maas visited the Yucatan, for the first time two years ago, they holidayed in the small village of Chicxulub-Progreso, on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. What they saw there prompted them to join in spearheading the organization of an animal welfare program to benefit hundreds of injured and starving dogs.

"Everything (in Chicxulub) is very small town - casual and laid back. The Mayan people are a gentle populace, going about their lives as we do here, working hard, raising families and looking for education and health care to help them to a better life," Mrs. Maas says.

"We loved our time there, except for the dismaying plight of the dogs who run the streets and, to a lesser extent, the cats, although you hardly see any."

Mrs. Maas says the Mayan people's government spends a large portion of its budget on education, health and sanitary infra-structure. Very little money is left for animal disease control or spaying and neutering programs. Once a year, strays are killed off with strychnine-laced meat.

"The tragedy is that many of these dogs have easily treated diseases, but, allowed to roam they become a major health threat to children, since, as we know, all children love puppies," she adds.

"When a dog has puppies, all of the family friends take one, but they don't have the money or the information to neuter it. It is loved, fed and played with, until it grows too big for the family to feed. Then, it is put out on the street to fend for itself.

When it tries to come back, it is driven off with boots and sticks and, most often, with sand thrown in its eyes. A really sad thing to see is that the children learn to treat adult animals in this way."

Mrs. Maas observes that, until recently, many of these dogs and cats have scavenged on the streets and



A dog with an old leg injury.

beaches. Often, they die a slow and painful death from poisoning, starvation or disease. Sometimes, they are hit by cars that leave them in the road, dead or suffering severe injuries.

"Many of the dogs you see walking around are dragging a broken limb that has never been set. These are gentle, fearful dogs who will love you in a minute, if you can feed them, as most Canadian visitors do. But



Donna Maas, gone to the dogs, while vacationing in Mexico.



Willem Maas serves breakfast

when we all go home, their lot again becomes desperation," says Mrs. Maas.

Last year she and her husband and many other Canadian visitors made donations to the local veterinarian, who struggles to cope with the large numbers of dogs brought to her by well-meaning visitors. Lacking space to offer these stray animals proper care, she has been working hard to build a shelter where animals can be neutered, vaccinated and treated for disease and injuries. With a shelter, starving animals could be nursed back to health. Those too ill or too badly injured to survive could be humanely euthanized.

To accompany the building program, her committee plans to run an education and adoption program, so that animals would go only to Mexican or other families willing and able to cope.

"An outstanding example of successful adopters are Clay and Janice Samis of Brighton, who have brought back two wonderful dogs from Chicxulub - one last year and a second one this year," Mrs. Maas says.

Both dogs were found on the street and were taken in and nursed to health by the Samis family.

Mrs. Maas and her husband became so concerned by the plight of Chicxulub's stray dogs that they and other visitors to this Mexican town organized a Proteccion de

Perros (dogs) y Gatos (cats) fund raiser breakfast, at a beach front restaurant. Restaurant facilities were donated for the occasion.

"Enter the Canadians and our token Americans, many of whom are Rotarians from Ontario and the Quinte area. We ran up and down the beach, selling tickets to people from Belleville, Brighton, Carrying Place, Gananoque, Gravenhurst, Ottawa, Picton, Toronto and Wellington," Mrs. Maas says.

A total of 280 tickets was sold to raise 30,000 pesos or \$3,000 dollars. This money was added to the \$2,000 raised in donations, in previous years.

Local officials were persuaded to find a piece of delinquent tax property to donate to the cause, if project supporters would guarantee to fund the building. Mrs. Maas notes the cost for a cement block structure is very low.

"We also got the Progreso Rotary Club involved and they agreed to be the anchor in any effort we undertook to raise funds, through the various Rotary Clubs in the Quinte area. If we raise enough, we can get a matching grant from Rotary International, thereby assuring that the facility will be built. Then, we can help by providing used equipment for it. This effort is also being viewed as a proto-type for a program that could be implemented, throughout the Yucatan."

Mrs. Maas says many changes will have taken place, by next year. The dogs of Chicxulub will be treated humanely. The children will learn to love, not fear them and the animals will no longer be diseased. The streets will not be a breeding ground for ticks, lice, mites, worms, scourge and gastro-enteritis and the annual, unwanted explosion of puppies will not take place.

"This year's crop, unhappily, will still be doomed to a life of disease and misery," Mrs. Maas observes.

She says there is one compelling statistic that sums up the importance and urgency of the dog rescue project. An

unneutered female dog, through its own litters and the litters of its offspring, will produce 150 unwanted dogs, in a period of two years.

"Multiply that figure by the hundreds of dogs roaming in one small area and you get a good idea of the size of the problem," Mrs. Maas says.

“ Very little money is left for animal disease control, or spaying and neutering programs. Once a year, strays are killed off with strychnine-laced meat. ”