

FIRE DEPARTMENT NEWS

Cat care coalition donates oxygen masks for pets

The Billerica Minuteman, By Margaret Smith / Staff Writer

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Pets and their owners can breathe a little more easily, as the Fire Department readies to receive five sets of oxygen masks suitable for dogs and cats after a fund-raising campaign by the Billerica Cat Care Coalition and a pet boarding service.

Jeanne Galambos, a volunteer with the coalition, said she and the coalition raised funds to acquire the masks in conjunction with Cause for Paws a fund-raising program run by Best Friends, a nationwide pet daycare chain.

The chain's Tyngsboro location provided matching funds to help the coalition raise \$250 to buy five sets of masks, including masks suitable for large, medium and small dogs as well as cats.

The Fire Department will receive the donation of masks at a ceremony set for Tuesday, Aug. 8, at 9 a.m. at the main fire station.

The Fire Department had no masks for pets but instead would adjust masks for humans to fit on animals that required oxygen after fire rescue, said Fire Chief Anthony Capaldo.

"We don't have it happen a lot, but this will be good for us," said Capaldo. "We appreciate it. Anything like that, we appreciate it."

"We as people living in a community make a lot of assumptions," Galambos said. "I just assumed the Fire Department came and had everything they needed."

Galambos said she approached Capaldo about raising money for the masks after learning that many fire departments do not have masks that are specifically for animals. She said she was especially concerned after a recent house fire on Pond Street in which several pets were rescued.

Capaldo filled out an application to Best Friends to initiate the process, she said.

Becky Powers, a manager at Best Friends in Tyngsboro, said the chain encourages individuals and community organizations to raise funds for pet masks. Matching funds are provided for communities within 15 miles of a particular Best Friends location, she said. For those up to 30 miles away, the location will contribute 50 cents for each dollar raised.

Galambos said her volunteer work with the coalition includes helping at an annual chocolate-tasting fund-raiser and feeding stray cats in the coalition. The coalition manages feral cat colonies and seeks homes for animals deemed suitable for adoption. The coalition also coordinates low-cost spay/neuter programs.