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REARS Seeks Volunteers for Emergencies Organization Supports Animal Services During Disasters

WEDNESDAY, Dec. 9, 2015 – Riverside County is seeking more volunteers for the Riverside Emergency Animal Rescue System (R.E.A.R.S.).

The nonprofit group is a network of volunteers trained by Riverside County Animal Services to assist the department in large-scale emergencies, such as wildfires. The volunteers are dispatched through Animal Services' command structure.

Each year the department seeks new volunteers for an orientation meeting and various training exercises. The next orientation meeting is Saturday, Jan. 30, at the Western Riverside County/City Animal Shelter at 6851 Van Buren Blvd., Jurupa Valley. The meeting begins at 9 a.m. and usually ends at about 4 p.m.

Oftentimes, during a disaster, many people want to assist Riverside County Animal Services with rescue efforts. But the department only calls upon volunteers who have gone through the R.E.A.R.S. orientation and certification process, said Rita Gutierrez, commander for Riverside County Animal Services' field division.

"Our R.E.A.R.S. volunteer members are providing a huge value in our response to emergency events," Gutierrez said. "When it comes to saving and protecting and caring for the county's larger animals, these volunteers are critical in helping us cover more territory."

Wildfires are a common event when the R.E.A.R.S. team has been called into action, Gutierrez said. "But everyone is anticipating a very wet winter, so we're likely to call upon our R.E.A.R.S. folks when flooding issues may arise."

Volunteer members are generally horse enthusiasts because they're helping with evacuations of larger animals, livestock and the like, Gutierrez said. However, volunteering for R.E.A.R.S. is open to all residents, she said.

Volunteering for the nonprofit organization is her way of making sure she can help pet owners of large animals get the help they may need in major disasters, said Cindy Henderson, a resident in Riverside County's Gavalan Hills area.

She herself has a ranch property with almost 20 horses, including those owned and some that have been rescued from neglect. Henderson joined R.E.A.R.S. at its onset, after a fire event in the Big Bear Lake area resulted in would-be horse rescuers blocking emergency responders.

"We want to save horses from burning up," Henderson said. "But there needs to be organization. We don't want to hinder the fire department. We don't want to get in the way."

******* MORE MORE MORE *******

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Too many times, Henderson said, a fire event will result in too many “Johnny Come Lately types – people who want to be heroes,” she said. “But most of the people in R.E.A.R.S. are very humble. We just want to help but do so in the right manner.”

Henderson has assisted on about five official R.E.A.R.S. incidents. “I don’t mind if we are not getting called, that’s a good thing,” she said. “That means there isn’t an emergency. But if it happens, we’re ready.”

For more information, please send an e-mail to Rita Gutierrez at RDgutier@rcdas.org. The REARS volunteer application form can be found at this link: <http://www.rcrears.com/member.htm>. The Web site for REARS is located here: <http://www.rcrears.com>.



R.E.A.R.S. volunteer Cindy Henderson of Gavalin Hills poses with her 5-year-old mustang, Captain Jack