

Dog Rescuer Named Hero of the Year

Animal Planet recognized Eileen McCaughern for her work rescuing Greyhounds.

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Eileen McCaughern of Bethany, Conn., has been named the winner of the Hero of the Year contest, an annual campaign that recognizes people who demonstrate extraordinary service for the welfare of animals, sponsored by Animal Planet and the makers of Fresh Step litter.

Her efforts as the founder of Retired Greyhounds as Pets (REGAP) of Connecticut earned her the title, which was awarded to McCaughern for her dedication to rescuing more than 5,000 of these long-legged canines during the past 35 years.

Marjorie Kaplan, president and general manager of Animal Planet Media, described McCaughern as a hero for dogs who has improved the lives of countless animals through her compassionate devotion.

REGAP is a nonprofit group formed to educate the public about the joys of having Greyhounds as companion animals, and finding responsible homes for as many retired racing Greyhounds as possible. McCaughern works a full-time job and two part-time jobs in order to defray the costs associated with rescuing Greyhounds.

Additionally, she recently opened a kennel with funding secured from state grants, local businesses, private individuals, and the American Greyhound Council.

"Greyhounds are so special and so deserving of enjoying their retirement as pets in wonderful homes after their racing careers have ended," she said. "This honor will bring even more visibility to retired Greyhounds, helping them find adoptive homes. Being Animal Planet's 2008 Hero of the Year is truly an incredible honor."

As the winner, McCaughern receives a \$10,000 donation to her charity, REGAP of Connecticut, and a trip for two to her choice destination that supports an animal welfare cause. She was recognized by Animal Planet during "Heroes Week," which kicked off Dec. 8.