

Animal Shelter To Win Extreme Makeover

Earn points for your local animal shelter to qualify the facility for a \$1 million upgrade.

Posted: October 20, 2007, 5 a.m. EST

One lucky animal shelter is going to get a state-of-the-art renovation next year – worth up to \$1 million – and it's up to a website's online community to decide which shelters make the final cut.

The former CEO and "Top Cat" of Meow Mix, Richard Thompson, recently launched Zootoo House, a social-networking, opinion- and review-sharing website for animal lovers. When users complete actions such as uploading a photo, writing a review, or discussing news, points accumulate on the user's account. The points are earned for a shelter of the user's choosing. The Top 20 animal shelters that finish with the most points will all receive money, but the one that exhibits the most distress as determined by a panel of experts will receive the top prize, up to \$1 million. The exact dollar amount will be determined after the shelter is chosen and its' needs have been assessed.

Participation is free, as Thompson is putting up his own money to see this project through. Zootoo House was launched on Oct. 1, 2007, and the organization's application for nonprofit status has been submitted and is currently pending.

"It's my way to give back to the community," Thompson said. "As CEO of Meow Mix, we gave away millions of products to shelters around the country and I was always amazed that those were our customers in those cages. I wanted to give food to everybody ... It's not a pleasant experience to go into most shelters."

After the top shelters are determined, Thompson will tour all 20 locations along with other animal experts to determine which shelter is most deserving of the donation. A second-place shelter will receive \$10,000, and the 18 others will each receive \$5,000.

"I want to create something positive," he said. "I have no red tape."

Thompson said he hopes to create an ongoing foundation – with shelter makeovers at least once a year – and likens his goals to a pet version of the popular TV show "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition."

After months of research, Thompson and his staff compiled a list of approximately 3,500 active animal shelters throughout the United States. All are eligible for the contest, which runs through March 31, 2008. The winners will be announced in April 2008.

The shelters that currently have the most points are South Texas Animal Adoption Resource of Katy, Tex., Animal Shelter Inc., of Sterling, Mass., and Calhoun County Animal Shelter of Battle Creek, Mich.

Thompson served as CEO of Meow Mix from 2001 to 2006, when it was sold to Del Monte. In addition to his renovation project, he's said he hopes Zootoo House results in more pet adoptions due to increased awareness of shelter locations and needs.

To visit the Zootoo House website, [click here](#).

-Heidi Hatch, Associate News Editor for DogChannel.com