

Race Heats Up for New Pet Mayor of Montclair

Election in Northern California raises funds for nonprofit animal welfare group.

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Bella the incumbent Beagle and Charley the cat are among the top candidates vying for the seat of pet mayor in Montclair, Calif., are locked in a dead heat. The eight finalists include six dogs, one cat and a "lame duck" named Waffles.

Every vote the candidates win counts to support the Montclair Veterinary Hospital Pet and Wildlife Fund. In the first two weeks of the race, more than \$5,000 has been raised for the nonprofit organization, said Lee Richter, executive director.

In its fifth year, the Vote for Pet Mayor contest helps the community raise funds for the animal welfare group. In 2007, 11,000 votes were counted as part of the fundraiser.

Each online donation of \$1 is a vote, and stuffing the ballot box for a favorite candidate won't get people in trouble. This year, people have cast votes from Florida, Maine, Michigan, and New York, Richter said.

Duties of the pet mayor include serving as ambassador of goodwill, making special appearances and raising awareness about proper pet care. Pet candidates must possess good people skills, be friendly and warm, and have owners who are committed to community involvement, she said.

Each of the 200 businesses in the Montclair Village Association can sponsor a pet candidate of their choice and provide on-site polling places. Once a pet gets a local business sponsor, the campaigning can begin.

"That's the funnest part," Richter said.

Charley the cat is the lone feline among the final eight pet candidates. Charley is running on a political platform that promotes a safe and healthy environment for all beings.

The top two leaders in this year's race, Bella the Beagle and Gracie the German Shorthaired Pointer, are incumbents from the previous election. "They're pretty much neck and neck at the moment," Richter said.

Waffles the duck arrived at MVH Pet and Wildlife Fund with a leg injury. Somebody adopted him after his broken leg was fixed, and now he's the "lame duck" of the race, Richter joked.

Signs, stickers, and posters are encouraged in campaigns to spread the word and gain support. Voters are given "I Voted" stickers decorated with two paw prints.

People can go to the polls during a special election that takes place at the Montclair Village Farmer's Market on La Salle Avenue at Mountain Boulevard from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. every Sunday. The winner of the next pet mayor race will be announced at a ceremony June 15.

To cast a vote online, visit www.petandwildlifefund.org