

Veterinarian Escaped Hurricane Harvey with Her Westies, Created Safe Haven for Others' Pets

WFA VP Made Plan and Followed it to Safety

Hurricane season is here again even as the rebuilding is still underway in many parts of the southern U.S. from the damage left behind by storms in 2017. Perhaps sharing the story of WFA's VP of Health, Kay McGuire DVM, MS and her experience during the devastating flooding in Houston caused by Hurricane Harvey will help inspire other pet owners and help them better prepare in the event of another disaster.

By Teresa Barnes, Vice President Communications

When veterinarian Kay McGuire saw the heavy rain pouring down on a Friday in August 2017, she thought it could be a repeat of Hurricanes Rita and Ike that pummeled the Houston area in 2005 and 2008 respectively.

McGuire began preparations for her veterinary hospital and clinic to again become a temporary home to pets and maybe even people as it had then when it housed 26 pets and 11 people during Rita. What she didn't yet know was the rain would continue to push the region past flood stage and the levee near her home would be released.

The WFA Vice President of Health, McGuire also didn't expect her clinic to become her temporary home and for her dogs to live there for three months.

"The rain just kept coming," McGuire remembered about Friday, August 25, 2017. "It is difficult to even imagine that much rain."

As the water crept up the road toward her house near Bush International Airport north of Houston, McGuire took initial steps to insure her and her animals' safety while keeping a close eye on the rising water. She researched and documented her choices for evacuation routes and checked her emergency lists of supplies. At regular intervals of every two hours, McGuire made her way through the torrential rains and down her driveway for a peek at the rising water to assess how close it was getting.

By Saturday afternoon, August 26, things were markedly worse. McGuire could see water reaching her driveway and feared it would rise quickly. She knew it was time to activate her evacuation plan and put her logistics in motion.

She gathered the necessities she had set aside for herself, her dogs and the clinic and quickly packed them as well as her pets into



her car. She called her cousin, Lisa Singletary, with whom she had been in close contact since the rain started, to join her. Singletary, who lived just a few doors down in McGuire's rental home, quickly loaded her vehicle, as well.

Together, the two brought with them 12 dogs, including three nine-week-old Westie puppies. They drove the animals to the safety of McGuire's veterinary clinic and hospital, Suburbia North Animal Hospital, Houston.

McGuire recalled animals being brought to her for shelter during Hurricane Rita in 2005. She welcomed the animals to safety, as owners dropped them off as they, too, evacuated. More might have come to the clinic, McGuire said, had people been able to get there. "The freeways were packed and people were stuck," she said. She said of the animals that were being brought in, some were suffering from heat stroke from the intense temperatures on the freeways.

As a result of previous storms, and the nightmares that played out on the freeways such as the ones described by McGuire, this time, Houston officials asked most people to stay in their homes if they could. Businesses, including many veterinary offices across the area, were forced to close because of flooding or the inability of staff to make it in.

McGuire's veterinary clinic was operational within days of the storm. "I was getting animals in – no one else was open," said McGuire. "I was there, so I took them." She took emergency cases and housed animals needing shelter. In all, there were 20 animals being housed at the clinic.

Veterinarians often act as first responders during natural disasters like Hurricane Harvey, said McGuire who was an emergency veterinarian earlier in her career. "I think like any other type of

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first responder, we are almost put in that situation – trying to provide a place of rescue for animals. We took a lot of animals from people who were displaced,” she said. “I am in a compassionate industry. Veterinarians love animals.”

McGuire choked up as she recalled the loss of so many pet lives in addition to human lives as a result of the devastation last summer. “A lot of people were forced to unfortunately leave animals. Some died. Some were given up,” she said.

“Kay is a survivor and is always thinking of dogs first, as well as others,” said Bebe Pinter, president of the WFA. “She is a good person to have with you in an emergency.”

Pinter drove her RV to McGuire as soon as the water receded enough on the highways for her to make the 50-mile trek from her home west of Galveston Bay. She knew the RV could be parked behind the veterinary clinic and provide shelter for McGuire as her home restorations began. She and Singletary lived in it until Thanksgiving. “She maintained a work schedule seeing patients and overseeing the reconstruction of her home,” said Pinter.

Pinter’s home was spared during Hurricane Harvey but she learned how valuable her RV could be when she, her husband, Randy, and their five Westies lived in it for several days following Hurricane Ike. “Many people suffered flood loss,” said Pinter about the storms that hit Texas last summer. “When owners are stressed, their dogs are stressed.”

You could say 2017 was a tough year for McGuire. She lost her mother early in the year and she lost both her home and her rental house in the hurricane. Somehow, though, she still feels lucky. Her business was spared and she made it out safely with her animals.

She began the rebuilding process almost as soon as the more than three feet of water receded from her home – within 24 hours of her evacuation.

In part because she planned ahead and even hired a home repair company prior to evacuating, the process of rebuilding started almost immediately. Still, nearly a year later, there is still work to be done, but McGuire is grateful her situation wasn’t worse.

The animals weathered the storm well, too, according to McGuire. Especially the Westies. “The Westies took it better than any of the dogs,” she said. “It was a sense of excitement for them.”

Her preparation had paid off.

As you make preparations for potentially dangerous storms this season, consider these tips compiled by the WFA from our team of experts as well as a 2014 disaster guide published by Harris County, Texas, the largest county in the state which includes Houston.

When creating a crisis plan for you and your family, it is imperative that you make preparations for your pets as well.

A PET EVACUATION CHECKLIST should include:

- Food and water (seven-day supply)
- Crate (make sure the crate door can be secured). Include extra crate pads and pee pads
- Unbreakable/travel friendly bowls for food and water
- Leash and/or harness (plus an extra leash and collar or harness)
- Medications and identification tags including pet’s name, contact phone number, as well as tags for proof of shots including rabies (tags) and tags disclosing any medical conditions your pet has (include all tags on pet’s collar).
- Important pet-related documents and enclosed
- Toys and pet beds
- First aid kit for pets
- Muzzle for each dog
- Life vest that fits your pet (one for each pet)
- Grooming supplies
- Absorbent towels (that pack small)
- Pet-safe insect repellent
- Hard-copy list of important contact phone numbers to include a veterinarian, pet sitter, groomer, as well as important resource numbers such as poison hotlines and local emergency numbers

****Label important items and include your name, contact number and address**

Plan in advance for options that will work for both you and your pets and even pack non-perishable items ahead of time in a backpack or other easy-to-grab bag should conditions require rapid evacuation. Leave a note tied to the bag containing a list of last-minute perishable items that need to be added.

“In the event of an evacuation, the single most important thing you can do to protect your pets is to take them with you. If you need to find a safe place for them ahead of time, check with your local animal care agency to help identify a pet-friendly evacuation shelter in your area,” Houston County officials write in their emergency response manual.

For more information about disaster preparedness for your pets call 202-452-1100 or visit www.humanesociety.org/disastertips

Possibly the most important tip is to ID your pet. Do that now. Make sure that your cat or dog is wearing a collar and identification that is up-to-date and visible at all times. You’ll increase your chances of being reunited with a lost pet by having him or her microchipped. Also, if your pet is adopted from a shelter or rescue organization, make sure the registration has been transferred.