

PALOS VERDES
PENINSULA NEWS



Keep Your Paw Off the Remote

PV on the Net teams with local vet to create "It's a Dog's Life" video for canine couch potatoes; proceeds to benefit charity.

By **Josh Cohen**
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Coleman lumbers up to the television and lies down next to his friend Tracy. He's 137 pounds of Newfoundland, all black fur and paw's the size of dinner plates. Despite the wagging tail, you would think twice before changing the channel on Coleman's favorite show.

Tracy is a golden retriever and she's anxious to get the video started. She nudges Coleman to keep quiet while the credits roll. It's her favorite, too. After all, the short movie, "It's a Dog's Life," was created with the canine in mind.

The pair's owner, Ted Vegvari, isn't in the business of filmmaking, nor is he a veterinarian. Most would recognize Vegvari from his work as the director of Palos Verdes on the Net, which is responsible for creating web sites for the four Peninsula cities.

But Vegvari has a deep passion for animals, particularly those tens of thousands of pets that are abandoned, mistreated or live without proper medical care every year. Both Tracy and Coleman were rescued from shelters.

Vegvari teamed with Cassie Jones, who heads the Point Vicente Animal Hospital in the Golden Cove Shopping Center, a Hollywood director, dog trainer and a fever canine thespians to create "It's a Dog's Life," a 15-minute video for dogs to enjoy when human television doesn't have enough bite to it.

"Two paws up," says Vegvari of the canine response to the video.

"Make that four paws," says Jones, who wrote the screenplay. "There's even a hidden message in the video that kept my cats interested ... until they went behind the television and figured out a dog wasn't really there."

The video is offered to people who donate \$20 or more to itsadogslife.com. The fund was created by Vegvari to distribute to a variety of rescue organizations, including Peninsula Pet Rescue, the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, the Pet Protector's League and others.

"We put the money into an account, the animal organizations go online to our web site, fill out a form explaining why they should get some of this money and then we go through a committee and disburse the funds," said Vegvari. "We're not focusing on any one region or area, but obviously the more money we raise, the more organizations will receive something."

According to Jones, some 60,000 to 70,000 animals are put down every year in the Los Angeles area. Animal rescue organizations do more than save pets from certain death, said Vegvari.

"They also help educate people about spaying and neutering," he said. "We're trying to make a dent in reducing the number of animals that aren't spayed or neutered, as well as reduce animals that are bred unnecessarily for profit."

Dog's Life

To encourage donations, Vegvari and Jones immersed themselves in their roles as big-time movie producers. They hired a professional director in William Coleman whom Vegvari said "hadn't tried anything quite like this before." They also hired actors, namely Hollywood – Dog Extraordinaire, to film the difficult and tedious getting-a-bath scene.

"We auditioned five dogs for the part, and Hollywood barker her lines the best," said Vegvari.

"It's a Dog's Life" takes its four-legged viewers through a dog day afternoon, all from a canine's perspective. There's a ride in the car with your head out the window, a splash through the beach surf, a trip to the dog park and a game of chase with neighborhood children.

Jones's script capitalizes on dogs' attraction to movement and sound.

"The audio really works – the keys jangling for the car, the can opener for dinner – time," she says. "At one point, some of the dogs we tested got excited when a dog in the video takes a bath and shakes the water off on a bunch of kids. They start screaming and running and the dogs just seem to enjoy that."

"Some dogs have been riveted by the video," said Vegvari. "It's a little long to have dogs sit through the whole thing, but they each sort of pick out a different part they like. The first day I took it home .. Tracy watched a few sections intently with me on the couch."

Just as important, said Jones, is the pet-owner interaction that the video brings about.

"You can see that Ted is getting so into his dog right now," she says as Vegvari works to get Tracy to sit down for the video's grand finale. "There's bonding time. And it may teach people to be better owners, [by] using leashes and giving their dogs a bath, to understanding the kinds of things their dogs enjoy doing, like going to the dog park or the beach."

"It's a Dog's Life" is available at www.itsadogslifevideo.com and is offered free to those who donate \$20 or more to the Animal Rescue Foundation. For more information or if you don't have Internet access, call the Point Vicente Animal Hospital at 265-9511."