

HELP FOR YOUR ANIMALS IN AN EMERGENCY . . . AT VALLEY CENTER **LAST!**

V.C. LAST stands for **Valley Center LARGE ANIMAL SAFETY TEAM**, and our primary focus will be to assist the community in providing for the safety of our animal populations in emergency situations. **V.C. LAST** is a community volunteer organization, working with the Valley Center Fire Protection District, the Valley Center Sheriff's Department, Valley Center CERT (**C**ommunity **E**mergency **R**esponse **T**eam), the County of San Diego Department of Animal Services, and the San Diego Humane Society and SPCA.

In the past seven years, Valley Center has experienced two enormous wildfires. Many of us were evacuated. Lives and homes were lost. The calls came in the middle of the night, and we did the best we could under the circumstances to get our families, and our animals to safety. These events were horrific, but we did learn from them where our weaknesses are, and how we may better prepare for future emergency situations.

Communities like ours present unique challenges. We are remote from many resources, our homes are spread out and roads can be narrow and winding. We also have many large domestic animals which require special handling in an emergency. There are horses, llamas and alpacas, goats, sheep, cattle, emus, and dogs and cats, to name just a few. Many people who were forced to leave their homes were unable to evacuate their animals themselves, and they were left behind. This is where the **Valley Center Large Animal Safety Team** can help.

Large Animal Safety Team members, including animal care professionals, are training now through FEMA, CERT, the Fire Department, and the County of San Diego Department of Animal Services to provide assistance in the event of an emergency. They may aid in evacuating animals from dangerous situations, or caring for them in place while you are evacuated. These qualified **V.C. LAST** team members will function only under the direction of the governmental agency authorized to handle the logistics of a given situation, whether it be fire, flood, earthquake or some other situation creating a danger.

But, we need your help to help you! We need to know how many animals are in the area, and what kind they are. We need to know who has adequate trailer capability, and who will need assistance. We also need to know what trailer capacity is needed, and whether a large trailer can get to your property safely. Knowing the size and make-up of the animal population in the community will enable responders to plan for and staff adequate temporary shelter.

To gather this vital information, displays with questionnaires will be placed at the counters of many of our local merchants. You may complete the form at home and return it to us by mail; return addressed envelopes will be available if you request one at the counter. You may choose to e-mail your information to vclast@vccert.org, fax it to 760-751-1778, or leave it with the participating business. The questionnaires are also available through the link to the **Valley Center Large Animal Safety Team** on the CERT website; vccert.org. Your veterinarian or farrier may also ask you to complete one.

While the main purpose of **V.C. LAST** is to assist in providing for our animals, the first concern in any emergency is the safety of people. **V.C. LAST** is working closely with the Valley Center Sheriff's Department, the Valley Center Fire Protection District, and CERT. They have asked that our questionnaire contain a section for people with special needs. Perhaps you, or a neighbor, no longer drives, needs oxygen, has mobility issues, or is otherwise handicapped. Maybe you live alone and are unable to handle an emergency situation by yourself. Even if you do not have animals, please take a moment to complete this section of the questionnaire. Your information will then be filed with the appropriate emergency response agency, who will know that you may need help. A fire official or team member may also contact you for more detail regarding your special needs.

The information you provide will be used to create a data base, or "map", of the animal populations and special needs individuals in Valley Center. Information may also be gathered by team members doing physical surveys of the community. This data will enable emergency personnel to mount an orderly and efficient response in a disaster situation -- to get where they are needed with the appropriate equipment and personnel as quickly as possible.

The information you provide to **V.C. LAST** will **ONLY** be used for this purpose. Your personal information will not be shared with any person or organization outside of those directly involved in local emergency response operations. With that assurance, please take a moment to complete the questionnaire, and give us the information we need to help you and your animals in the event of a disaster.

The Valley Center Vaqueros are an important part of our equestrian community. Their meeting on February 11th, at the Community Center on Lilac Road, will be open to the public for a special presentation by the Valley Center Fire Department and **V.C. LAST**. Come and learn more about this innovative new program, how it can help you, and how you can become involved.

Everyone should have their own family emergency plan, but it is not always possible to be completely self-sufficient. Completing the **Valley Center Large Animal Safety Team Questionnaire** could be an important part of your personal family plan. Do it now!

If you have any questions, need a questionnaire, or are interested in becoming a team member, please contact **V.C. LAST** at vclast@vccert.org. You may also call Kathy Ames at 760-908-6137, or visit our web page through vccert.org.