2023 Volunteer of the Year Nomination: Marilyn Freund
Submitted by: Marin Humane

1. Briefly state the organization's mission and services offered. How long has the nominee volunteered for the organization, including the number of years served and type of service?

The mission of Marin Humane is to transform lives through exceptional animal care, humane education, and advocacy. Every day, we inspire compassion and positive relationships between people and animals. We bring animals and humans together, forging a bond that impacts not just our homes, but makes our neighborhoods happier and healthier. And no one does more to make that happen than Marin Humane.

Some of our services include:

- Animal Adoptions
- Animal Services for Marin County (*enforcement of ordinances, dog licensing, cruelty investigations, wildlife rescue, and lost and found services*)
- Dog and cat training classes and seminars as well as consultations
- Youth programs
- Pet Care Assistance for pet guardians in need
- Volunteer Engagement
- Animal-Assisted programs, including therapy visitations and classroom and library visits
- Pen Pals program at San Quentin
- Animal responders in disasters and emergencies
- Safe harbor for animals in families impacted by domestic violence

Marilyn joined the Marin Humane volunteer team in 2017 and is an invaluable member of three departments. Marilyn plays the important role of an adoption counselor at Kitty Corner (our adoption center in San Anselmo) matching kitties find their purrfect homes; she is an integral member of the Behavior & Training department's Feline Intervention Team, helping socialize our shy and shut down felines to help them become more adoptable. And if that weren't enough, Marilyn spends her evenings making important follow-up calls to recent adopters of our shelter cats and kittens. Lastly, Marilyn is a key member of our Marketing and Communications team as our star cat photographer and photo editor.

Marilyn volunteers five days a week, dedicating nearly 20 hours each week in these volunteer roles, resulting in almost 600 hours so far in 2023! Marilyn stands above and beyond due to her commitment to the shelter kitties and her can-do attitude!

2. Using examples from 2023, describe how the nominee has shown dedication and commitment to the organization or its constituents.

Marilyn supports our adoptable cats from the beginning of their journey at the shelter, through every stage, including adoption and beyond! Most cats that arrive at Marin Humane are understandably nervous, scared, or shy. Their worlds have usually been turned upside down and the comfort of a

gentle, understanding, and feline-savvy volunteer can have a profound impact. Marilyn's work with the Feline Intervention Team helps cats who need a little more behavioral support settle into the shelter environment and show their true selves, making them better adoption candidates. Furthermore, Marilyn's interactions with the felines in this capacity assures she has familiarity with the cats she discusses in her post-adoption calls.

Then she puts her camera skills to work, photographing our available cats and kittens and putting her beautiful portraits on our website. Since we have reduced our shelter foot traffic post-Covid, to reduce animal stress, these photos are more important than ever. The cats' profiles on our website are frequently the first point of contact we have with our adopters, and photos that stand out and catch the eye can make all the difference in making a great match between a cat and their new family. Marilyn photographs hundreds of cats and kittens each year, taking her time with each animal to gain their trust and find their best angles, followed by hours of photo editing, cropping, and uploading each picture to our shelter software and website. Marilyn also supports the Marketing & Communications team by providing editing support on our written communications, from our bi-annual magazine to our weekly articles in the Marin IJ.

Then she steps in to help adopters find their perfect match with her adoption counseling at Kitty Corner, our offsite adoption center in San Anselmo. At the beginning of 2023, Kitty Corner has been led by an all-volunteer team. Marilyn stepped up to organize the site, creating management systems to streamline Kitty Corner and make it operate more efficiently and smoothly.

Once cats and kittens are adopted, adopters often have a lot of questions. Enter Marilyn, once again! Marilyn makes post-adoption calls to adopters to ensure the match is going smoothly at home. With her extensive knowledge of feline behavior, Marilyn is able to offer support and constructive advice. Some calls may be a brief check-in, other calls last some time as adopters love to extoll the virtues and antics of their new feline family members. Marilyn answers questions about future veterinary treatments, how best to introduce the new family member to other pets in the household, and sometimes, refer adopters with complex situations to the cat behavior office. Over the past year Marilyn called over 650 clients who have adopted felines from Marin Humane, representing about 50 calls a month! This role of making personal phone calls to adopters is extremely important as it sets adopters up for success and helps avoid a cat being returned or surrendered down the road.

Marilyn is incredibly pro-active, always coming up with solutions and jumping-in wherever needed. Marilyn says, "It's my nature to get involved and lend a hand to make a difference. I love doing everything I do at Marin Humane and Kitty Corner!"

3. Illustrate with examples how the nominee made a significant, positive impact on the organization or the community they serve during 2023.

Marilyn has undeniably made a significant and positive impact on our animal shelter, leaving an indelible mark on all she works with, thanks to her unwavering dedication and passion for shelter cats.

In 2023, Marilyn's tireless efforts have not only improved the lives of countless feline residents but also enriched the lives of adopters.

As anyone who works in animal welfare can attest, dogs so often outshine their feline counterparts in a shelter setting. And yet, we consistently have a higher population of cats and kittens than we do dogs. Finding a volunteer who will dedicate themselves to our residents of the feline persuasion is invaluable.

Marilyn's love for shelter cats is evident in her daily interactions. Through her role as a Feline Intervention team member, Marilyn spends hours providing love and care to the shy and shutdown cats, ensuring they receive the attention and enrichment they deserve. Her ability to create bonds with even the most timid cats is remarkable.

What truly sets Marilyn apart is her ability to work with both people and cats. As an adoption counselor at Kitty Corner, she serves as a bridge between potential adopters and their future feline companions, matching them with the perfect pet. This unique skill has significantly increased our visibility in the community and enabled many cats to more quickly find their forever homes. Beyond her volunteer contributions, Marilyn's personable nature has made Kitty Corner a warm and inviting place for volunteers and visitors alike. She fosters a sense of community, inspiring others to join in her mission to provide shelter cats with love and forever homes.

Additionally, Marilyn makes post-adoption phone calls, lending an ear and offering advice to new adopters. Marilyn's outreach to adopters makes a tangible difference. Her initiative, warm personality, and feline knowledge leave adopters with a very positive experience with Marin Humane.

Cats are easily stressed in the shelter environment, with all the additional noise and activity compared to a home, and this often leads to them becoming sick. Reducing their stress and the length of their shelter stay is key! Marilyn helps reduce our shelter cats' stress through her work with the Feline Intervention Team and reduces their length of stay by first catching the eye of potential adopters with her beautiful photos, then providing potential adopters with match-making support when they visit Kitty Corner. She then ensures the cats are settling into their new homes with her post-adoption phone calls! In a year when our shelter cat population has grown, Marilyn's support has been priceless.

In 2023, Marilyn has proven that one individual's passion and dedication can create a lasting, positive impact on an animal shelter, reminding us all that change is possible when driven by love and compassion.

4. Based on what you know about the nominee, how have they contributed to promoting a culture of equity, belonging and fairness within the organization or community.

As an adoption counselor, Marilyn is open-minded and welcoming to people of all backgrounds who are simply visiting Kitty Corner or are interested in adopting. Marilyn is eager to share her knowledge of cats with people rather than judging them for their lack of knowledge. Both characteristics promote a culture of belonging and fairness and make her a true asset to the organization.