

Animal Cruelty Case Resolved

August 31, 2009, Fort Myers, FL – An animal cruelty case involving more than 80 animals confiscated September 23, 2008 has been resolved. A search warrant was obtained by the Lee County Sheriff's Dept. for property on Jackson Rd. in Fort Myers. Animals confiscated from the property were found to be living in extremely unsanitary conditions, exposed to toxic air quality levels, and suffering from a lack of medical care and food.

The property was leased by a local rescue organization know as "My Best Friend, Inc." whose owner, Carrie Cagata, originally faced 120 charges of animal cruelty and abandonment. Cagata pled guilty to two misdemeanor charges of animal abuse. She received two years probation, \$2,000 in fines plus court costs and cost of prosecution. In addition she must perform 400 hours of community service and cannot have contact with any animals during her probation period other than the pets she currently owns.

James Cullen, the caretaker of the property on Jackson Rd., previously pled guilty to charges in this case on March 24, 2009. He received 300 days in jail, 12 months probation, and over \$1,900 in fines and court costs.

In October 2008, Lee County Domestic Animal Services was awarded custody of the animals confiscated in the case. Despite the medical conditions of many of the pets, most were able to be adopted into new homes or were claimed their legal owners. More than \$70,000 of treatment and training was required to increase their adoptability.

Lee County's Animal Care Trust Fund provides medical assistance for homeless, sick, injured, and abused pets. Anyone who would like to assist pets like those confiscated for cruelty in the Cagata case may send their donation to Animal Care Trust Fund, c/o Lee County Domestic Animal Services, 5600 Banner Dr., Fort Myers, FL 33912. Anyone who can offer assistance by fostering pets in need until they are ready for adoption may call 533-7387 (LEE-PETS) for information. Foster applications are also available online at www.LeeLostPets.com.