

Pets as Prizes: Giving Away Animals Is a Gamble



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By Rebecca Simmons

A pair of tickets to the theater, an autographed baseball, dinner for two at a local bistro anda puppy? Yes, you heard right—eager to raise funds for their organizations, an increasing number of schools, Rotary clubs, and other non-profits around the country are positioning pets as prizes in charity auctions and raffles.

There's just one problem: In the process of raising money for one good cause, these groups are simultaneously undermining another important ideal—animal welfare. While on the surface it may seem that giving away animals is a great way to bring together people and pets, organizations are instead doing just the opposite by offering critters to people who may not have the time, resources, or desire to provide for an animal once they realize the amount of care a pet requires.

"When you auction or raffle off a live animal, you lose any and all opportunities to try to match the pet with the person's expectations of a pet," says Ann Joly, Executive Director of the Healdsburg Animal Shelter in Healdsburg, California. "It becomes an impulse thing, like getting the cute puppy in the window at the pet store."

Impulse Buy

A spontaneous purchase is one thing when it comes to snagging a new pair of shoes or a trendy T-shirt, but a pet is a different story. Whether it's a pint-sized pooch or a pretty parakeet, all require time, effort, money, and dedication.

"People spend weeks or months planning a couch or camera purchase, but some of these same people don't really think through how much money and time a pet requires when they put a bid on a live animal at a charity auction or fundraiser," says Kelly Connolly, issues specialist for the Companion Animals section of The HSUS. "Often it is a spur-of-the-moment choice, an overwhelming desire to outdo a fellow bidder. The HSUS believes this is not how a pet should be brought into a family. Not only can pets require a large financial commitment—food, supplies, and veterinary bills can run into the hundreds or thousands of dollars—but many pets can live for well over 10 years. There is absolutely no way to determine if the winner of an auction or raffle is prepared or has the ability to provide proper care to their new pet. And regardless of how financially solvent he or she may be, simply having enough money to invest in the auction or purchase of a pet doesn't guarantee a lifelong home for that animal."

Critter Commitment

There's no question—the **decision to become a pet guardian** is a big one and requires careful thought, research, and planning. But when people buy a raffle ticket or bid on an animal at an auction, there is little or no chance to make the decisions that surround pet guardianship. Encouraging people to act on impulse and decide in a matter of minutes if they are ready for the kind of commitment that pets require is not only unrealistic, but also irresponsible.

"When a person acquires a pet in an instant at a charity auction event or fundraiser, it can be a very tough situation," says Connolly. "In many of these cases, because the person is unable or unwilling to commit to the responsibility needed to be a pet caregiver, the animal is the one who pays, by being relinquished to the **local animal shelter** or sometimes simply abandoned. Events where live animals are auctioned or raffled off merely lend credence to the mistaken idea that animals are dispensable in today's society, items to be won, enjoyed for a short period of time, and discarded. The HSUS is trying to correct that thinking by working to help people to understand that having a pet is a lifelong commitment not to be undertaken lightly."

Speak Up!

Want to help stop the practice of awarding pets as prizes in your community? If you know of a local non-profit or business that gives away animals during fundraising or promotional events, you can help by educating the organization—and your community:

- Contact the organization or the sponsors of the fundraising event and politely tell them why you oppose offering pets as prizes. You may want to include a copy of the [HSUS statement on the use of animals in auctions and other events](#). Suggest that the organization offer gift certificates for pet supplies, grooming, obedience classes, or veterinary service instead of live animals.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper expressing your concerns about pet auctions. Communicating through a public forum is a good way to educate community members about responsible pet ownership and the pitfalls of giving away critters in order to raise cash.
- Talk to your friends and family about what can happen to a live animal being auctioned off by a charity, and urge them to reconsider attending events that use animals this way.

By letting organizations know that it's unacceptable to award pets as prizes, animal lovers can help people in their community understand that a giving an animal a forever home is more than just a game of chance.

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