

Tulane students foster, adopt animals in wake of Hurricane Francine

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Tulane University students rallied to support the Louisiana SPCA's urgent appeal for emergency pet fostering in anticipation of Hurricane Francine. (Photo courtesy Zoe Caplan)

Tulane University business student Zoe Caplan was planning to ride out Hurricane Francine with her three roommates in Uptown New Orleans when she heard the Louisiana SPCA needed help fostering the cats and dogs boarded there until the storm – and threat of potential flooding – had passed.

"We thought, we could foster a dog for a few days," said Caplan, who rents an off-campus house with friends. When she arrived at the shelter and was paired with a charming chocolate Lab mix named Raven, she felt it was meant to be. "I'm from Pennsylvania and grew up near Baltimore, so I'm a huge Ravens fan," she said. "Everyone in my family cheers for the Ravens."

Hurricane Francine's impact on New Orleans was relatively mild, resulting in a brief period of emergency pet fostering for Caplan. However, this short time was enough for her to know that Raven deserved a permanent, loving home. So instead of simply returning Raven to the shelter, Caplan chose to adopt her.

"I'm bringing her home to Pennsylvania for Thanksgiving, and I have a feeling my parents won't let me bring her back to college," said Caplan, a Tulane senior majoring in finance. "Raven has such a sweet nature – she's bound to steal their hearts. They're going to love her."

Caplan's experience is one of dozens as Tulane University students rallied to support the SPCA's urgent appeal in anticipation of Francine. The Category 2 storm made landfall in nearby Terrebonne Parish on September 11, prompting a flash flood warning for New Orleans and surrounding areas. As radar detected heavy thunderstorms in the hours following Francine's arrival, the SPCA issued a city-wide call for temporary foster homes.

What the SPCA hadn't anticipated was the power of social media. Their plea was shared on popular social media apps, igniting an unexpected surge of support from Tulane's student body.

"We witnessed an unprecedented turnout of potential foster caregivers, with Tulane students forming the majority," said Ana Zorrilla, CEO of the Louisiana SPCA. "These were primarily off-campus residents or those planning to evacuate to their family homes, all eager to provide temporary shelter for an animal in need."

Zorrilla said fostering during storms is a tremendous help to shelter workers responsible for keeping animals fed and their living quarters clean, sometimes

operating with a skeleton crew and on generator power when the electricity goes out. It's also safer to have the animals elsewhere in the event of flooding and can help make space for displaced pets after the storm until owners return.

"I hate to say it, but there will be a next time, and we're always appreciative of community members who step up to help out," Zorrilla said. "When the end result is an adoption, it's just best-case scenario. It doesn't get any better than that."

For Raven, the best is yet to come.

"I can't wait to bring her home to Pennsylvania," Caplan said. "We have a very small yard here in New Orleans, but my parents have a sprawling property, and it's next to a farm, so she's going to be able to run and explore and have the best life. She's going to love it."



Zoe Caplan, a Tulane senior majoring in finance, with her adopted chocolate Lab mix, Raven. (Photo courtesy Zoe Caplan)

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