

300 RESCUE PETS ARRIVING BY AIRLIFT ON SATURDAY 8/27



Pet Welfare Groups Team Up with Tito's Handmade Vodka for Historic Freedom Flights of Rescued Dogs and Cats from Puerto Rico to New York and Maine on Saturday, August 27

Pets on-board Saturday's aircraft face dire conditions without intervention

Using two aircraft, pet-transport charity Wings of Rescue will fly the 300 homeless and abandoned pets from The Sato Project in Puerto Rico to White Plains, NY and Portland, ME. All the adoptable pets are accompanied by a health certificate, meet all vaccination requirements, and will be spayed or neutered before placement into new homes.

With funds donated by Tito's Handmade Vodka through the spirit company's Vodka for Dog People program, along with support from individual donors, the AmerisourceBergen Foundation, The RTA Store, Christopher Harding and Flew the Coop, Sydney Hale and Co., Sidewalk Angels Foundation, and Bark Box, the rescued pets will be placed for adoption by the receiving rescue groups and shelters. Sixty of the dogs on board will have new families waiting for them at the airport. No local pets will be displaced by the arrival of these flights.

The 165 dogs and 135 cats on these two missions were rescued from the streets and beaches of Puerto Rico or pulled from the island's severely overcrowded municipal shelters. Puerto Rico has a stray animal crisis, where it is estimated more than 500,000 homeless dogs roam the streets, suffering without food, fresh water, or veterinary care. Municipal shelters in the U.S. territory have a combined 94-96% euthanasia rate.

Funds for the two flights were raised in part during a well-attended Dogs Named Tito mixer, held by Austin-based distillery Tito's Handmade Vodka as a part of their Vodka for Dog People program, whose vision is to better the lives of pets and their families far and wide. On board one of the two flights will be Beth Bellanti Pander, Tito's Vodka for Dog People Program Manager, and a rescued puppy named Tito, who will serve as official mascot for the rescue operation and is debarking in New York, headed for a new home.

FULL PRESS RELEASE FOLLOWS .

AUGUST 27, 2022 • SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO, WHITE PLAINS, NEW YORK, AND PORTLAND, MAINE

A coalition of animal welfare groups has come together to airlift 300 rescued dogs and cats in a one-day push to find new homes for the pets, which will be traveling Saturday, August 27th from Puerto Rico to New York and Maine aboard two cargo aircraft. The 165 dogs and 135 cats are part of an ongoing “Freedom Flight” campaign to rescue and rehabilitate pets in Puerto Rico and transport them to shelters and families in the mainland United States (where demand for adoptable pets remains high), and where no local pets will be displaced by those in the airlift.

The two flights are being operated by the pet-transport charity Wings of Rescue and coordinated by The Sato Project, a New York-based rescue organization dedicated to saving abandoned and homeless pets from the streets and beaches of Puerto Rico. Loading of pets in San Juan will begin at approximately 1 a.m. EST and after making a fuel stop in Florida, the two planes should arrive in White Plains before noon EST. They will be met there by representatives from The Sato Project along with other rescue partners and many of the families who have pre-adopted pets on the flight. One of the twin-engine turboprop planes will then continue to Portland, Maine, where the Animal Refuge League of Greater Portland (ARLGP) will be coordinating with other area shelters to place the remaining dogs and cats into new homes.

Major funding for the Freedom Fights is being provided by Tito’s Handmade Vodka, with secondary support from the AmerisourceBergen foundation, The RTA Store, Christopher Harding and Flew the Coop, Sydney Hale and Co., Sidewalk Angels Foundation, and individual donors. Additionally, on arriving in Puerto Rico to pick up the pets, Wings of Rescue will be delivering over 6,000 pounds of much-needed pet food donated by subscription pet-supply company BarkBox. The Sato Project will be distributing this food to shelters, independent rescuers, and pet owners in need.

“We are thrilled to be the main transportation link in this impressive one-day rescue effort to save 300 lives and bring happiness and joy to countless families and individuals,” said Ric Browde, President of Wings of Rescue. “The Sato Project and the Animal Refuge League of Greater Portland are among the finest rescue groups in the country, and we are fortunate to have financial support for these missions from the pet-friendly team at Tito’s Handmade Vodka, who are, along with our other supporters, committed to saving lives and generating happy endings.”

Wings of Rescue is a donation-supported charity that transports abandoned, homeless and otherwise at-risk pets from overcrowded shelters and disaster areas to the safety of rescue facilities and animal-welfare organizations where each pet is given proper care and a new home. Founded in 2012, the organization has flown more than 62,000 dogs and cats from harm’s way to new homes. Throughout North America there is an imbalance between areas with too many pets and those where demand outstrips local rescues, creating the need for the life-saving long-distance transport of healthy, adoptable pets. Wings of Rescue flies only pressurized and temperature-controlled aircraft to assure pet safety and comfort, and only flies to locations where no local pets will be displaced by arriving ones.

"With peak hurricane season right around the corner, my team and I are determined to transport as many of these animals off the island as possible, while it is still safe to fly," said Chrissy Beckles, Founder and President of The Sato Project. "We are so grateful to our transport partner, Wings of Rescue, all of our shelter and rescue partners, and donors. This massive undertaking would not be possible without a great deal of hard work and collaboration. Together, we are giving 300 deserving animals a second chance at life."

The Sato Project has rescued over 6,200 dogs since its inception in 2011, rehabilitated them with the highest standards of veterinary care and placed them in loving homes in the mainland United States. The rescue group, which has an administrative office in New York and personnel on-the-ground in Puerto Rico, last month opened a new property in Puerto Rico - 'Sanctuary by The Sato Project.' This new property is where rescued dogs are cared for until they can make it to areas where adoption demand guarantees they will quickly be placed into new homes.

"We are honored to be a part of this life-saving event and look forward to providing these pets with wonderful new families in our Maine communities," said Jeana Roth, Director of Community Engagement at the Animal Refuge League of Greater Portland.

The ARLGP provides temporary care and shelter for stray, abandoned, confiscated and relinquished animals, and places as many pets as possible into responsible and caring homes throughout Maine. As a high-adoption, open-admission facility, there is no time limit on an animal's stay in ARLGP's care. The life-saving organization sent a team to Puerto Rico earlier this week to assist with preparing the pets for their journey and is coordinating with a number of Maine animal welfare groups to find homes for the airlifted dogs and cats.

The two Wings of Rescue aircraft will arrive in Puerto Rico on Friday, August 26 and deliver donated pet food and other aid to The Sato Project volunteers. Then in the early hours of Saturday, August 27, the 300 pets will arrive by ground transportation to the Isla Grande Executive Airport (SIG) in San Juan where they will be loaded on to the waiting aircraft. All pets are contained in comfortable crates and each has a fresh water supply for the trip.

Among passengers on the two flights is the officially designated mascot, a mixed-breed puppy named Tito whose title was inspired by the support that came from Tito's Handmade Vodka and the funds raised during their Dogs Named Tito mixer, which celebrated dogs that shared their name. The pup, Tito, was rescued from the streets of Puerto Rico and will be going to Animal Haven, a shelter in Manhattan, to find his new home.

"Tito's Handmade Vodka is dedicated to helping our furry friends find safety from both overcrowded shelters and potential storms in Puerto Rico," said Beth Bellanti Pander, Tito's Vodka for Dog People Program Manager. "Wings of Rescue and The Sato Project are making huge impacts in animal rescue and we're grateful to support their missions. After many years of working together, I look forward to hopping on my first transport flight with a pup named Tito and his friends, and bringing them one step closer to finding their forever homes."

During the early years of Tito's Handmade Vodka, Tito's took in abandoned and stray dogs that wandered near their distillery. As the company grew, so did their desire to help the community, which led to the launch of Vodka for Dog People. Through this program, Tito's has rescued over 115 distillery dogs, worked with thousands of animal-focused vet and transport nonprofits, and hosted countless Yappy Hours to celebrate the bond between pets and their people.

Additional support for the two Freedom flights is provided by the AmerisourceBergen Foundation, BarkBox, thousands of Individual donors, the RTA Store, Christopher Harding and Flew the Coop, Sidewalk Angels Foundation, and Sydney Hale and Co.

This massive undertaking would also not be possible without the collaboration of additional rescue groups in Puerto Rico and receiving shelter partners on the mainland.

Rescue organizations in Puerto Rico include: El Faro de los Animales, Santuario de Animales San Francisco de Asís, Second Chance Animal Rescue PR, Vieques Humane Society, Villa Michelle Albergue de Animales

Mainland receiving shelter partners include: Animal Haven (NY), Kent Animal Shelter (NY), Paws Crossed Animal Rescue (NY), Animal Refuge League of Greater Portland (ME), Second Chance Animal Rescue NY (NY), Rescue City Brooklyn (NYC), Atlantic City Humane (NJ), Animal Lighthouse (NY), Westchester SPCA (NY), Animal Rescue Foundation (NY)

"It takes a huge team of good-hearted and hard-working individuals to execute an airlift of this magnitude," said Wings of Rescue's Browde, "and so to the rescue personnel on the ground, to the pilots and support teams in the air, to the van drivers, dog walkers, veterinarians, our corporate sponsors and especially to the loving individual and families who adopt each pet, we all say a giant 'thank you.' Saving pet's lives is a big deal made up of many, many small acts of kindness."

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MEDIA NOTE: This is a highly visual story as pets are loaded and unloaded from the planes and transported to local shelter facilities or released directly to adopting families. Media representatives are welcome at the airports, but because of security restrictions and scheduling variables we require advance notice so coverage can include appropriate tarmac access. Please see below for locations and media-access contacts.

Due to the variables involved in a long flight all times are estimated. For up-to-date information, please contact Gene Gable at Wings of Rescue 707-235-0869, or local shelter contacts (listed below) and we will send out regular updates throughout the day.

DEPARTURE DETAILS FROM LUIS MUNOZ MARIN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, SAN JUAN PUERTO RICO: Estimated that loading of pets on the two planes will begin at Luis Muniz Marin International Airport at approximately 1:00AM EDT. The flights can be tracked online at flightaware.com by using the plane's

tail numbers, which will become available on Friday. Media wishing to cover the loading in San Juan should phone ahead to Gene Gable, 707-235-0869 PDT for exact times and location.

ARRIVAL DETAILS FOR WESTCHESTER COUNTY AIRPORT IN WHITE PLAINS, NEW YORK:

Estimated arrival time is between 11:00AM and noon at Million Air, 136 Tower Rd, West Harrison, NY 10604. Media are welcome at the airport to cover the unloading of the pets, and Wings of Rescue, Tito's Handmade Vodka and The Sato Project representatives will be available for interviews. Reporters wishing to attend the landing **must call ahead**. Please contact Tara Steinberg at The Sato Project, 217-415-0369, tara@thesatoproject.org, or as a backup, Gene Gable at Wings of Rescue, 707-235-0869, gene@wingsofrescue.org.

ARRIVAL DETAILS FOR PORTLAND INTERNATIONAL JETPORT, PORTLAND, MAINE:

Estimated arrival time is 1:00PM at Northeast Air, 1011 Westbrook St., Portland, ME 04102. Media are welcome at the airport to cover the unloading of the pets, and Wings of Rescue and Animal Refuge League of Greater Portland representatives will be available for interviews. **Media wishing to attend the landing and unloading in Portland must call ahead**. Please contact Jeana Roth, jroth@arlgp.org, (207) 517-3932 or as a backup, Gene Gable at Wings of Rescue, 707-235-0869.

ABOUT MEDIA ASSETS:

Each of the sponsor shelters, Wings of Rescue and Tito's Handmade Vodka representatives will have images and video available after the flights. Please contact any of the media relations representatives listed below for more information or to set up pre- or post-flight interviews.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

ABOUT THE SATO PROJECT

Since its inception in 2011, The Sato Project has rescued over 6,200 dogs, rehabilitated them with the highest standards of veterinary care and placed them in loving homes in the mainland U.S. We are addressing the underlying causes of overpopulation, abandonment, and abuse through community outreach and low-cost spay/neuter and vaccine programs. To date, we have spayed/neutered over 7,500 dogs and cats. Since the devastation of Hurricane Maria in 2017 and the earthquakes of 2020, The Sato Project has also expanded into disaster relief efforts, including distributing humanitarian and animal emergency supplies, pulling dogs from overburdened municipal shelters with 94%+ euthanasia rates, and reuniting families with their beloved pets via our No Dog Left Behind program. For additional information visit: www.thesatoproject.org

MEDIA INQUIRIES: Tara Steinberg, Communications Manager, 217-415-0369, tara@thesatoproject.org

ABOUT THE ANIMAL REFUGE LEAGUE OF GREATER PORTLAND

The Animal Refuge League of Greater Portland nurtures the connection between people and pets to advance animal welfare and improve the quality of life in our community. The ARLGP provides temporary care and shelter for stray, abandoned, confiscated and relinquished animals, and places as many pets as possible into responsible and caring homes; we create awareness and support for the humane

treatment of all animals; we strive to end animal overpopulation through education and the promotion of spaying and neutering. www.arlgp.org

MEDIA INQUIRIES: Jeana Roth, jroth@arlgp.org, (207) 517-3932

ABOUT WINGS OF RESCUE

Wings of Rescue is a donation-supported charity that transports abandoned, homeless and otherwise at-risk pets from overcrowded shelters and disaster areas to the safety of rescue facilities and animal-welfare organizations where each pet is given proper care and a new home. Additionally, every year Wings of Rescue planes deliver thousands of pounds of humanitarian and veterinary aid to communities and pets in need, and the group serves as sponsors for spay/neuter programs and other life-saving practices. Since its founding in 2012, Wings of Rescue pilots have safely and efficiently flown over 61,000 pets out of harm's way and on to new lives. The nonprofit group operates hundreds of missions per year carrying thousands of dogs, cats, and other small companion animals to and from locations throughout the United States, Canada and the Caribbean. Advocating that all pets deserve a healthy and loving home, Wings of Rescue believes that responsible pet ownership enriches lives and builds stronger and more compassionate communities. For additional information visit: www.wingsofrescue.org.

MEDIA INQUIRIES: Gene Gable, gene@wingsofrescue.org, 707-235-0869

ABOUT TITO'S HANDMADE VODKA

Tito's Handmade Vodka was founded by sixth-generation Texan, Bert "Tito" Beveridge. In the mid-nineties, on a plot of land in rural Austin, he built a 998 square foot shack, rigged a pot still with spare parts, and created Tito's Handmade Vodka. An important part of the story at Tito's Handmade Vodka is the innate connection the company has with its canine counterparts. Since the beginning, Tito's has been committed to rescuing and protecting animals and, through its Vodka for Dog People program has helped better the lives of pets and their families far and wide. Tito's has teamed up with a number of organizations across the country to transport pets from dangerous situations to safety, giving them a chance to find forever homes.

For more information visit: titosvodka.com

MEDIA INQUIRIES: titos@sunshinesachs.com, 361-834-3141