

PetHub redefining art of lost pet recovery

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World photo/Mike Bonnicksen

PetHub graphic designer and marketing specialist Alex Cerreli takes a moment to play with Ullr, who is owned by company founder Tom Arnold. Employees say that someone brings their pet to work almost every day at their Wenatchee office. The company makes pet identification tags with QR codes that can be scanned and help identify the pet when they are lost.

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WENATCHEE — Big things are happening at PetHub, a local company reinventing the art of quickly returning lost pets back to their owners using whiz-bang technology.

The Wenatchee-based company is seeing explosive growth across the country but it is also having an impact on our local economy. Those who license their pets through the Wenatchee Valley Humane Society will automatically be part of the PetHub starting in 2018.

Since January, the Wenatchee-based company has increased the number of pets in their online system from 50,000 to 200,000, a growth curve that is accelerating. They've recently signed contracts with some of the biggest counties in the country; include Miami-Dade County and San Diego County. A year ago, PetHub had two municipal contracts. Currently they have 23 and another 60 or so are in the pipeline.

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I met recently with PetHub founder and chief technology officer Tom Arnold, director of marketing, Lorien Clemens and their small team at the small warehouse they rent in South Wenatchee.

It's been quite a journey for Arnold, a former Microsoft employee who started developing PetHub seven years ago as a way to quickly reunite lost pets with their owners. It's a passion project that is driven by an ethos of wanting to make a difference in the world while building a profitable company.

The traditional way of returning lost pets is expensive, time consuming and labor intensive, they told me. Lost pets typically end up in the shelter while an agency searches for the owner. In some cases pets have a microchip and if the information is up-to-date, the owner is contacted. Or the pet might have a metal tag (most cities and counties require licensing pets for this purpose) and that can help facilitate recovery of the animal.

The national average is that it costs \$20 per day to house a stray animal and the average stay is 10 days, so the cost per animal is \$200.

PetHub provides a unique solution designed for fast recovery of animals. The PetHub tag has a QR code that can be scanned and will immediately contact the owner as well as a phone number, web site (PetHub.com) and a unique pet number.

The key is immediacy. Clemens said 97 percent of animals that are part of PetHub.com are back to their owners in 24 hours and 35 percent are back within four hours of being lost.

What that means for an animal shelter is obvious. The more that community members can assist in recovering animals, the fewer lost animals will have to be sheltered and that will lower costs of animal control for organizations like the Humane Society. Clemens said the data shows that less than two percent of PetHub animals end up in a shelter. That's impressive.

Here's a brief primer on how PetHub works. Municipalities sign on for a PetHub contract that costs roughly the same as the metal tag that currently as a pet identifier.

When people license their pets, they get a PetHub tag and can go online and fill out contact information and other information in case their pet goes missing.

When someone finds a lost pet, they call the phone number for PetHub, scan the QR code or access the web site to identify the pet's owner. The owner is either contacted by the call center or they get a text alert.

There is an option for pet owners to sign up for premium service which allows them to be notified of the GPS location where their pet is found as well as contact numbers for multiple people in case the owner is not available.

The premium service also creates an Amber Alert system for pets that creates an online lost pet profile that can be shared on social media and will also automatically be sent to shelters within a 50-

mile radius.

I was impressed that there is a philanthropic feature of the premium package. A portion of the money from \$5 or so a month from users goes back to the local shelter as a contribution.

Arnold and Clemens told me their intention is to shift the perception of licensing pets from something that is required to something that creates value for pet owners.

Arnold, who skied with his family at Mission Ridge as a youngster and who was drawn to the area by the outdoors and the community, is committed to doing as much business locally as possible. They moved their call center business GTC Technical Support, a local company.

“They’re truly a technical team, not just some retired people answering the phone,” he marveled. “They go above and beyond.”

Recently, Arnold started discussions with local manufacturers to see if it would be possible to produce the tags locally.

PetHub, which started in Bellevue and shifted to our valley, seems poised for impressive growth that could lead to an expansion of the six full-time staffers (five local) and three part-time employees.

Bringing dollars into our valley by selling technology that might redefine the lost pet industry would be an economic boon.

rwoods@wenatcheeworld.com

509-665-1162

Reach Rufus Woods at 509-665-1162 or rwoods@wenatcheeworld.com.