

Animal shelter donation critter cans disappear from local merchants

Rayburn Township-based facility seeks help in identifying the malefactor(s)

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A representative of Orphans of the Storm discovered last week that several donation cans were missing from local merchants. The shelter seeks the public's help in identifying the culprit(s) responsible for their disappearance. Chris Jirak O'Donnell | For The Leader Times

You see them everywhere.

As you wait in line to pay for a meal, a tire change, or your pet's vet visit, their sad eyes gaze up at you, begging you to feed them your spare change.

They are the dog and cat critter collection cans that benefit Orphans of the Storm (OOTS), Armstrong County's animal shelter that is located in Rayburn Township. Pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters and even dollar bills fed to the cans end up feeding the homeless dogs and cats at the shelter.

These donations add up to make a significant difference in helping to pay for the shelter's operational day-to-day needs.

Alleged theft discovered by OOTS board member

The public is generous, as are the local merchants who provide space for the cans.

However, it was discovered last week that not all are so charitable.

OOTS board member Darlene Moorhead discovered that two critter cans were missing as she made her regular rounds to the more than 25 merchants, located throughout the county.

Moorhead collects the donations often to avoid any container filling up with a large amount of money.

"We have never had a problem of anyone taking them before," said Moorhead.



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The local police have been notified.

And at least one of the thefts may have been recorded on a video surveillance camera.

COVID affecting donations

Critter can donations have suffered as a result of businesses being shut down due to COVID.

“More than 50 percent of the merchants who allow us to display our plastic dog and cat cans are, themselves, recovering from being closed. They are now in the process of reopening,” said Moorhead.

With the return of customers, the shelter expects the critter cans to begin filling up once again.

And, with so many people struggling, the thefts may have been an act of desperation.

“For those in need, we want them to know that the shelter offers a Pet Pantry to help people struggling to feed their pets,” said Moorhead.

“And local human service agencies can also assist with other needs,” she continued.

Security measures implemented to protect donations

While the critter cans are securely located near cash registers and often on surveillance video, the shelter has taken additional security measures to protect donations. Critter cans will be secured to make them more difficult to remove.

Merchants will also only release the cans to Moorhead.

“We do not want anyone to hesitate to donate to our shelter. We are taking all measures to alleviate concerns that may arise from these recent thefts,” said Moorhead.

Anyone having information on the crime should call the shelter at 724-548-4520.

OOTS is located just outside of Kittanning and was established in 1969 to provide temporary shelter to unwanted and abused animals.

More information can be found at: [orphansofthestorm pa.org](http://orphansofthestormpa.org).

Chris Jirak O'Donnell is a contributing reporter for the Leader Times.