

# 200 adoptable dogs land at A.C. airport from Puerto Rico

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There was a conveyor belt of 200 dogs exiting a jet at Atlantic City International Airport on Saturday, on their way to a new home from the streets of still storm-ravaged Puerto Rico.

“We do this monthly or every couple of months,” said Humane Society of Atlantic County Executive Director Steven Dash, who said his group works with St. Hubert’s Animal Welfare Center and other organizations to bring dogs from the island to the states for adoption.

“But after the last hurricane, we have definitely ramped it up. Literally hundreds and hundreds have been rescued off the island,” Dash said of Hurricane Maria in September.

The Puerto Rican groups El Faro de Los Animales (the Lighthouse for the Animals) and Island Dog work in Puerto Rico to arrange the animals for transport, he said, even though their own facilities suffered during last Fall’s two hurricanes.

“Hundreds of people are on waiting lists to bring their animal in to shelters. The island is still suffering without power and without water,” said Dash. “El Faro was devastated and hasn’t been able to reopen. But (its workers are) still doing a lot of groundwork there.”

USA Today reported in early March that 16 percent of the island is still without power, but in some regions up to 65 percent of the population is still living without electricity.

The Humane Society is small, so it took about 35 animals, Dash said. The rest will be taken to shelters elsewhere in the state, and in Pennsylvania and New York.

Most were dogs, but there were five cats and two kittens. The dogs include a wide variety of breeds, from chihuahua to mastiff, Dash said.

In addition to handling local dogs that are surrendered, Dash said his shelter pulls animals from other South Jersey shelters, and brings some up from the southern U.S. states.

“Anything friendly gets adopted. Public support for this is really good,” said Dash. “There are people who have an issue with some organizations pulling animals from out-of-state. But all of us that do this pull from other local shelters as well. We all work together as a group.”

He estimated that about 25 percent of the dogs placed for adoption through the Humane Society come from Puerto Rico now.

It gives potential adoptive families a wider variety of dogs to choose from, he said.

“We’ve been doing these transfers 30 years,” said Dash. First his shelter brought them mainly from South Carolina, then Virginia, and now Georgia and Puerto Rico.

“I’ve always looked at it that if there is no ability for them to be adopted and will be destroyed, we are saving a life. Whether they are from Georgia or Pleasantville, it’s still a life.”

St. Huberts, which is based in Madison in Morris County, handles placing the animals in other shelters, he said. It also runs a program to reunite people who left Puerto Rico after the hurricanes with their animals stateside.

Another 100 animals flew into Newark International Airport on Sunday, Dash said.

*Staff Writer Lauren Carroll also contributed to this report.*