

The Ferret Community Outwits The Grinch

When a mean-spirited trick threatened the holidays for ferrets at a ferret shelter, the ferret community delivered a special Christmas.

By Marylou Zarbock

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An empty box and a nasty note nearly ruined the 2008 holidays for the ferrets and shelter operator at a small ferret shelter in Florida. Many members of the ferret community stepped in to save the holidays, but it wasn't until just recently that the shelter operator wished to answer interview questions about what happened.

Happy Anticipation Turns To Outrage

The story begins with The Giving Tree. The Giving Tree is a website designed to help ferrets at ferret shelters enjoy a good Christmas. Ferret shelter operators submit the names and a little information about ferrets at their shelter to the website. This information is then posted so that visitors to the site can choose a ferret and become its Secret Santa and send a gift. The Giving Tree has appeared for several years and helped many ferrets.

In late 2008, Linda Lake, who has operated The Fuzzy Follies Ferret Shelter and Rescue in Winter Haven for 12 years, submitted the names of six ferrets from her shelter to The Giving Tree. It was the first time she ever submitted any ferrets. All the ferrets were at least 6 years old, and most had major health issues.

The six ferrets — Old Man, Bella, Dawnie, Tang, Nutter and Chaz — were soon adopted from The Giving Tree. When a box arrived for them with a computer-generated label, Lake opened it with anticipation. But the box was empty, except for a note containing a single, mean-spirited sentence that Lake doesn't want repeated. Hurt and angry, Lake confided what happened to a friend. That friend told the story of what happened to the ferret community via the Ferret Mailing List and other Internet groups. The person who sent the empty box quickly became known as The Grinch.

Ferret People Save The Day

What happened next? "The kids got a Christmas like they have never seen before," Lake said. "The ferret community went above and beyond to make sure they had a hell of a Christmas. People from all over the country [via] phone calls and e-mail. [It] was unbelievable."

Lake said she received 18 packages with gifts, and 30 to 40 e-mails and cards from people who wanted the ferrets to have a good Christmas.

The outpouring of generosity and goodwill overwhelmed Lake. "You will never know how full my heart was and still is. You know it really wasn't the material things that the kids got that truly mattered, it was the way the ferret community came together and made me and the kids feel like family. I've made friends that will be just that — for a lifetime."

The shelter is currently home to 27 ferrets. Old Man crossed the Rainbow Bridge in January, but he experienced a special Christmas. "To watch them play with their new stuff was so cool," Lake said. "When UPS pulled up outside, they would wait at the door. It was so funny."

The identity of The Grinch remains a mystery. Lake still doesn't understand why someone would do what was done. "If you have a beef with me, come to me to settle it," she said. "Don't take it out on animals that can't defend themselves."

Lake doesn't know if she'll put ferrets on The Giving Tree in the future. She might because it's for the ferrets and she believes she's not the only person to be a victim of The Grinch.

Overall though, the incident made her realize she was lucky. "To see what they got was beyond anything you can imagine. I am humbled and truly blessed."