

Renee Downs, A Ferret-Friendly "Hurricane"

Ferret enthusiast Renee Downs spreads good will wherever she travels.

By Rebecca Stout

Posted: April 1, 2008, 5 a.m. EST

At the fundraising dinner for a Portland ferret shelter, Downs laughs when presented with a novelty hat as a gift.

F.E.R.R.E.T. Is Born

Described by friends as spirited, tenacious and fearless, Downs has used these attributes during exceptionally challenging rescues she's volunteered for, such as the Ohio rescue of nearly 600 ferrets in 2007. These attributes also helped her pioneer the group, F.E.R.R.E.T.

Downs considered creating a group like F.E.R.R.E.T. for a long time to help ferrets during disasters, but it was hard to get people to see the need. After the many hurricanes in the Gulf during 2005, attitudes changed. Things took off for F.E.R.R.E.T. once the IFC supported the effort. A board of directors and a designated fund, the Emergency Love Fund, were created. Today, F.E.R.R.E.T is on its way to becoming a 501(c)(3) organization with a very exciting future ahead. The plan is to create a working relationship with the major ferret organizations. A plan would then be created for future large-scale rescues.

"We will serve as a liaison with rescuers, provide on-site assistance at the request of rescuers, educate non-ferret rescuers in providing appropriate care and coordinate efforts and offers from individuals with the needs of those needing assistance," Downs said. "Currently we are working to develop a manual to assist in rescues so that we will be better coordinated in the future."

Downs believes that success depends on support and cooperation between the following ferret organizations — the American Ferret Association, Support Our Shelters, IFC, Ferrets Across America, ferret shelter operators and people who have worked at major ferret rescues. Many representatives from these organizations are already in the group.

More success is likely around the corner. "[Renee] has a way of thinking outside the box, finding innovative ways to get past bureaucrats, politicians and just plain human obstinacy," said Susann Thiel of New York, a fellow F.E.R.R.E.T. board member. "Countless ferrets owe their lives to Renee. Many more will survive in the future because of what she has achieved."

As for Downs' future, she likes to imagine herself visiting faraway places like Antarctica, Africa and the Galapagos Islands someday. Meanwhile, she makes a difference in the world by helping to care for animals, the young, elderly or handicapped -- anyone who can't defend themselves. One of Downs' favorite quotes seems to define how she lives her daily life, "I am only one person. I may not be able to do everything, but I can do something."

More About F.E.R.R.E.T.

F.E.R.R.E.T.'s website, www.ferretemergency.org, was designed and is maintained by Susann Thiel. Details of how to become involved and how to participate are on the site. This upbeat ferret organization happily welcomes anyone who is interested and will help you find your own niche within the group.

Page 1>>

To see all Ferret Superstars columns, [click here>>](#)

Rebecca Stout resides in rural Tennessee with her husband, two sons and beloved pets. Ferrets have been in her heart and life for 30 years. She enjoys writing, photography, animals and being a strong advocate for her autistic son. To visit her website, [click here>>](#)