



Local Heroes 2011

The Santa Barbara Independent's 26th Annual Ode to Our Region's Most Important Residents

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By Indy Staff



Paul Wellman

Isabelle Gullo and
Carlos Abitia

Carlos Abitia and Isabelle Gullo: Creators of CARE4Paws

“Isabelle and I have always been in the animal business,” said Carlos Abitia, who cofounded CARE4Paws with his wife, Isabelle Gullo. The couple — who met at the Santa Barbara County Shelter, where Gullo was volunteering and Abitia works as a technician — created the nonprofit because they realized that no matter how hard the various animal-welfare groups work,

the cycle of overpopulation of dogs and cats continues. Explained Abitia, “Nothing is going to change without education.”

That’s where CARE4Paws comes in. In the past two years, the nonprofit has implemented half a dozen successful community programs to aid in the reduction of orphan animals. A veterinarian from Mexico, Abitia focuses on bilingual and bicultural outreach. “Spaying and neutering has never been a priority in the Hispanic communities,” Abitia said. “It’s due to a lack of awareness, not a lack of love for their animals.”

Gullo, a writer by trade, handles public relations and has been instrumental in spreading CARE4Paws programs into the community, especially through the annual Wags ‘n’ Whiskers Festival, which is the largest adoption fair in the county. Their most recent program, Companion Pet Assistance, helps senior and low-income pet owners with the financial burden of properly caring for a pet. “The key was getting everyone to work together,” Gullo explained of how they’ve been able to achieve so much in such a short time.

Through their spay and neuter assistance to low-income pet owners, CARE4Paws — in collaboration with the S.B. Humane Society and area vets — helped more than 500 people fix their furry companions in 2010; they hope to double that in 2011. And they won’t stop there: By the end of 2014, Abitia and Gullo plan to have reduced the number of adoptable dogs in Santa Barbara shelters by 50 percent.