

# THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

## Strays caught in Web

Internet used as safety net for pets

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Cyndi Cunico is on a mission to rescue Australian shepherds from being put to sleep in Valley pounds.

Cunico recently found a quick way to do that in Apache Junction without ever leaving her Mesa home.

With a few mouse clicks, Cunico virtually rescued an Australian shepherd by visiting the AJ Animal Control Department's new Web site at [www.ajcity.net](http://www.ajcity.net). It features pictures and descriptions of all the pound's inhabitants.

The city's site is part of a growing trend among animal shelters and rescues, which are turning to the World Wide Web to find homes for abandoned pets.

"Without the Internet, we could never get a dog adopted. We just adopted a little dog out to Colorado, and they found us on the Internet," said Cunico, who tries to find homes for dogs she rescues from city pounds.

Apache Junction Animal Control Officer Tom Aulik hopes his new site, which has been up for about two months, will reduce the number of animals he has to put to sleep every year - now about 1,000.

"Our goal is not to euthanize any animals," Aulik said.

Animals are usually held about a week before they are put to sleep and the site is a way to get their pictures out there to more people, Animal Control Officer Tim McGrady said.

"It's really starting to pick up. It gives the dogs and cats more of a chance," McGrady said.

This week, a woman called from Florida to inquire about a Mexican hairless dog on the site. A couple from Strawberry also called to say they wanted to adopt a dog on the site.

"People still think we're out in the boonies. They don't want to travel all the way out here just to look so the site helps," said Margaret Cease, a police dispatcher who has been filling in as the office's secretary for two months.

Cease said the phone has been ringing so the word must be getting out.

The first week of this month yielded 1,200 hits compared with just over 1,500 for all of December, said Rick Henry, an Apache Junction database administrator who designed the site.

Henry said he decided to help after spending time around the animals while updating

the pet licensing system, which was not Y2K compliant.

He squeezed in time between his other duties to create the site and teach the office staff how to post the pictures and animal descriptions.

"You want to take them all home, but you can't," Henry said. "This was a way I could help."

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