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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Palm Springs Unified Honors Animal Samaritans with Shiny Apple Award**

**Thousand Palms, CA – May 18, 2009:** The Palm Springs Unified School District has given its Shiny Apple Award to Animal Samaritans' Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) program. The award usually goes to the district's most outstanding teacher or administrator of the month. This marks the first time the district has honored an animal welfare organization in this way.

For the past five years, Animal Samaritans' AAT volunteers have been bringing therapy dogs to special needs classrooms, a service the organization performs in Desert Sands Unified schools as well. The dogs offer a range of therapeutic and education-enhancing opportunities to the students they see. For some, AAT animals serve as attentive listeners to struggling readers; profoundly disabled students build muscle coordination as they stretch and stroke the animal's fur.

Animal Samaritans' AAT members make regular visits to the following PSUSD schools: Bubbling Wells Elementary (3 classrooms); Desert Hot Springs Middle School (2 classrooms); Desert Hot Springs High School (5 classrooms); Cielo Vista Elementary (3 classrooms); and Landau Elementary (4 classrooms).

In 2008, AAT members made 403 classroom visits. Working with the AAT program, Animal Samaritans' Humane Education program teaches students how to be responsible pet owners, pet safety and dog bite prevention, how to recognize animal abuse, and the basic tenets of compassion for all living creatures.

Prior to acceptance into Animal Samaritans' AAT program, animals must pass a behavior training class given by a contracted animal trainer. Dogs are tested in 16 areas, from walking on a leash, to reacting fast and sudden hand movement, to manners around new dogs and people. Behavior testing occurs the last Saturday of each month, September through May.

Animal Samaritans SPCA, a 501 (c) non-profit organization founded in 1978, is committed to improving the lives of animals and people. As the Coachella Valley's most comprehensive animal welfare organization, they strive to one day eliminate the needless suffering and abuse of homeless and unwanted animals. Programs and services in place to save the lives of healthy and treatable animals include prevention through humane education, low-cost and no-cost spay and neuter, low-cost vaccinations, low-cost dental care and pet wellness exams, microchipping, animal sheltering and pet adoptions. In addition, more than one hundred volunteers from their Animal Assisted Therapy programs visit disabled children in special needs classrooms, nursing homes, and hospitals, while their Animal Assisted Activities teams see residents at Juvenile Hall.

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