

A Voice to the **Voiceless**

Doglando owner Teena Patel strives to speak up for and support homeless pets.

By Varinia Pereira

A tiny mouth gasps for air as the family home fills with flames. The EMTs reach for help, but have no equipment to help save the most helpless. This frightening situation was the reality until **Avalon Park** resident **Teena Patel** stepped in and raised the funds to supply pet oxygen masks, in every size, to the fire stations of Orange County giving every life a chance.

Patel's passion to help animals began way before her community involvement. Her father asked her what she wanted to do, she replied that she would open a shelter one day and then her dad asked how she would feed herself. Patel says, "I didn't know how I would feed myself, but I knew I had to follow my dream."

Her dreams became a reality when she opened Doglando. Although it is not an animal shelter, it gives Patel the tools, location and funding to give back to the community in every way she can. It is the only training facility authorized to work with the Orange County Animal Services. Patel takes dogs from the shelter that need training and puts them through two weeks of socialization and behavioral training so they become highly adoptable animals and can find a family. Patel has a master's degree in psychology and numerous certifications in all forms of animal behavior, counseling, training and instruction, but most of all, she has a passion and dream to give "a voice to the voiceless," she says.

She is also involved in a non-profit, sitting on the board for Puppy's B.r.e.a.t.h. that stands for "puppy's behavior, research, education, adoption, training and health." The organization is independent of Doglando, but she works with them and lets them use all facilities. It is a foundation that rescues puppies who are not yet born or less than 8 weeks old. Patel helps train, socialize and teach obedience and the puppies can only be adopted out once they complete the program. "This makes it a very little chance that the puppy would be returned to us because the owner is not prepared."

Community education is top on her priority list. She works with autistic children, introducing them to her own dog, a registered animal assistant to interact with the children, which is very therapeutic. And beginning in 2011, Patel will take one breed of dog each month to Avalon Park and have an educational session with the community. "The next generation needs to learn animal responsibility and follow through with caring for their pets," Patel says. She will introduce types of breeds, mental and physical stimulation techniques for dogs and where to adopt them.

Patel's husband, **Nimesh**, also shares her enthusiasm for helping animals. They met at Doglando when he went for a free consultation to adopt a dog. "I saw her passion then and we believed in exactly what she wanted to do—give a voice to someone who doesn't have one," he says. "I know her end goal in life is to help animals."

The Patels put on a Doglympics event for the past two years and hope to produce the event again in 2011, but are still looking for funding. Last year, more than 4,000 people attended making it the largest dog Olympics in the nation.

They always welcome volunteers anytime. "Everyone has a heart, but they don't know where to start helping. I don't care what your cause is, but you should have something. That's about existence," Patel says. **L**

Animal activist and Avalon Park resident Teena Patel with her boys, Wyatt, Dax and Tag.



Find out how you can help support the 2011 Doglympics by visiting CentralFloridaLifestyle.com.