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## Dog from Long Beach shelter now a San Diego hero

11:36 AM, May 7, 2008



Helene Shaughnessy's 4-year-old shepherd mix Ellie normally sleeps downstairs in her San Diego home, but on Oct. 21, 2006, the dog barked and nuzzled her owner, waking her up -- unusual for the normally shy animal.

Although the Witch Creek fire had been about 20 miles from her home when she went to sleep, Shaughnessy looked out the window when Ellie awakened her and realized the flames were just hundreds of feet away. Shaughnessy quickly collected Ellie and her cats and fled the home, which was destroyed by fire within hours.

One of several wildfires that devastated Southern California last fall, the Witch Creek fire burned 197,000 acres, destroyed 1,125 homes and killed two people.

On Tuesday, Ellie was honored in downtown Los Angeles with the 26th National Hero Dog Award by the **Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Los Angeles**. The award is presented to an animal that is not formally trained for rescues or law enforcement. SPCALA President Madeline Bernstein is on the left in the photo, and Shaughnessy is on the right with Ellie.

Jeff Blodgett, spokesman for the organization, said the presentation marked the first time in the history of the award that the honor has been given to a dog adopted from an SPCALA shelter. Helene adopted Ellie from agency's **P.D. Pitchford Companion Animal Village in Long Beach** in August 2006.

-Francisco Vara-Orta

*Photo: Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Los Angeles*

Posted by Francisco Vara-Orta on May 7, 2008 in [Animal Shelters](#) , [Dogs](#) | [Permalink](#) |

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## Our Bloggers

**Tony Barboza** is a reporter who covers Santa Ana and Irvine for the Times' Orange County Edition. He has written about a veterinarian shortage at L.A. animal shelters, a glass barrier birders called "the wall of death" and a controversial stunt to put a celebrity elephant in a giant bubble. He lives with his cats Mario and Vincent.

**Francisco Vara-Orta** is a staff writer at the Times in Los Angeles who covers breaking news for online, the Eastside, and Latino issues throughout the county. He has written about birth control for squirrels in Santa Monica and pigeons in Hollywood, the hidden culture of TV pet adoptions, and animal cruelty throughout Southern California. A L.A. transplant, he is from San Antonio, Texas, where his dog Diego now keeps his mother company.

**Carla Hall** is a general assignment reporter at the Times in Los Angeles. Frequently covering animals (and their people) throughout her 15 years at the Times, she's chronicled the Oakland Zoo's attempts to hand-raise a baby African elephant; followed the Los Angeles Zoo's LA-born gorilla Caesar on his trek to a new home at Zoo Atlanta; and interviewed pit bulls at the Laurel Canyon Dog Park. Currently animal-less, she still insists on plying people with anecdotes about her cat, Arnold, who died ten years ago.

**Tony Perry** is The Times' bureau chief in San Diego. Unlike other animal-loving reporters, he's lucky enough to have pandas -- along with frogs, elephants, and other creatures at the San Diego Zoo which he covers. He's also reported on efforts by the county Department of Animal Services to find homes for older dogs and cats. He and his wife, Ann, and their sons, Wes and Mike, have a family member named Jane, a standard poodle.

**Alice Short** is a news feature editor at the Times. She acquired her first pet, Pansy, a calico cat, at age 6. Amazingly, that cat tolerated being dressed in doll wedding clothes and paraded about in a baby carriage for hours. Alice currently lives with her dog Biscuit (and some kids and a husband) in Los Angeles. She has never dressed Biscuit in a wedding dress but has been tempted by doggie sweaters.

**Steve Padilla** is an assistant metro editor at the Times. He has written and edited articles on many subjects, including higher education and religion. He earned his first front-page byline at The Times with an article about pit bulls. He serves three cats -- Annie, Alex and Simon.

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