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Cardinals to honor Gilbert founder of animal sanctuary

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The Republic | [azcentral.com](#)

Sunday's game between the Cardinals and Seattle Seahawks won't just be a football game for Michele Elek-Zuberbuehler of Gilbert.

She will be one of five people honored before the national anthem with an Arizona Cardinals Community Quarterback Award for her work with Queen Creek-based Panacea Animal Wellness Sanctuary (PAWS), which she co-founded in 2009 to shelter handicapped animals that would otherwise be euthanized. She is the group's director.



Photo courtesy of Sherry Butler

Michele Elek-Zuberbuehler, co-founder of Panacea Animal Wellness Sanctuary in Queen Creek, is one of five winners of the Arizona Cardinals Community Quarterback Award.

One of 60 contenders for the award, Elek-Zuberbuehler is the only volunteer associated with an animal rescue organization to be chosen. She will receive a \$3,000 check as part of her award.

The Arizona Cardinals Community Quarterback Award recognizes volunteers in Arizona, ages 13 and up, who "exemplify leadership, dedication, and commitment to improving the communities in which they live," according to a release. Winners are chosen by a panel of community leaders.

Since its inception, PAWS has saved 105 dogs and 20 cats from being put to death, Elek-Zuberbuehler said.

Now, its sanctuary houses 15 dogs, seven cats and a horse. Although most of the animals are chronically ill "special-needs seniors," there are younger handicapped animals as well.

PAWS is raising money to build a permanent sanctuary that will include a medical clinic, food bank, and a classroom for the community to learn more about animal welfare topics.

"We believe that there should be a place for every domestic animal, be it with a family or in a safe haven/sanctuary," PAWS states on its website, pawsaz.org. "The public is still grossly uneducated about animal rights, animal welfare and animal wellness. This must be changed in order to make a difference in the future. The laws pertaining to keeping/breeding animals must be more stringent to help avoid future overpopulation. Education regarding spaying/neutering should start early, in the schools."

The website also states, "We provide a loving sanctuary/safe haven where they can live the rest of their lives in dignity and receive the necessary veterinary care and nurturing from volunteers. These animals do not live in cages. ... They live in a family style, group home setting"

PAWS runs a pet adoption service, and showcases its adoptable animals from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays at the PetSmart at 6932 E. Hampton Ave. in Mesa.

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