Press Release: Local volunteers launch free "Pet Alerts" lost pets notification app in time for July 4 weekend

"Pet Alerts" Lost Pet Notification App Launched by Local Civic Technologists

Austin, TX (July 1, 2015) – Local volunteers have released a free application that helps Austin area residents recover their lost pets in time for the July 4 weekend, when fireworks cause many animals to panic and run astray. The application, Pet Alerts, is available at http://pet-alerts.com.

Losing a furry member of your family can by a distressing experience. Pet Alerts seeks to provide a solution to the common question, "How do I know if my pet has been recovered by Austin Animal Services?" Pet Alerts allows residents to subscribe to receive text or email updates when an animal matching their lost pet's basic description arrives at an Austin Animal Center facility. All a residents needs to do to recieve notifications is select what type of animal (dog, cat, or other) has gone missing and include their email and/or phone number. To narrow the scope of notifications, animal owners can also optionally include the date the animal went missing and the gender of their pet.

The best immediate actions that owners can take when their pet is missing is to search and notify members of their community. The first few hours hours are critical in recovering a lost pet. But once a pet has been checked into Austin Animal Center (AAC) facilities, Pet Alerts provides a convenient option to passively receive updates on AAC intakes.

"We chose to work on this project because there was an obvious need and we wanted to work with the city to make the underlying data available in a better format," said software engineer, Tim Shelburne, lead developer of the app. "Once we had quality data, our first priority was to design a clear and simple process for pet owners to recover their pets," said designer and web developer, Natalya Shelburne.

The data for this app is powered by the Austin Animal Services integration with the City of Austin Data Portal, found at https://data.austintexas.gov/. Because Austin has a "no-kill"

policy, Animal Services relies on efficient animal repatriation in order to meet their goals and avoid overcrowding in their facilities. More information on Lost & Found Pets can be found on the Animal Services webpage, http://www.austintexas.gov/department/lost-found-pet.

"This app illustrates how open access to city data can provide new services to residents through the passionate work of civic technologists. This app has been several years in the making and a key factor in the release of this app is the partnership with Austin Animal Services to release quality lost animal intake data through the City of Austin Data Portal," said Open Austin Brigade Captain Mateo Clarke. "With the City's open data and hackathons like the ATX Hack for Change, we are becoming more successful in aligning community needs with the developers & designers that can create impactful solutions."

The "Pet Alerts" app is the second animal services-related app developed by the volunteers of Open Austin. The first, the @CutePetsAustin Twitterbot, is a Twitter feed highlighting adoptable pets at the animal shelter. It's available at

https://twitter.com/CutePetsAustin

Open Austin is a citizen volunteer group that promotes open government, open data, and civic application development in Austin, Texas as a part of the Code for America grassroot network of like-minded brigades. Open Austin was formed in 2009 by citizens interested in the City of Austin web strategy. Open Austin is on the web at www.open-austin.org

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