

A Doggone Good Time Was Had By All

By Traci Mutt
STAFF WRITER

If you want to see how animated the rebuilding community of Central Florida can get, start asking about the Ropp Auto Electric Christmas party in New Smyrna Beach. Each December for more than a decade, owner Kenny Ropp, his family and staff have been the catalyst for record donations to the local humane society. On December 11 the dogged efforts of their 300 guests resulted in a collection of almost two tons of pet food.

"They invite the humane society there and ask anyone that wants to bring something to bring pet food," said WAI-Transpo's Mark Tillotson. "The donations continue to get larger and larger each year."

Ropp said the 2003 donations were enough to catapult the humane society into 2004 with food funds completely omitted from their annual budget. Their contribution was topped only by Wal-Mart, although in this contest there is no animosity. This year it took two trucks to haul the food away.

"It's become quite the event in New Smyrna. We are really proud of what we do for our local humane society," said Ropp. "Not to mention it's a lot of fun. It gives everybody a nice feeling. People can come and not worry about cars and business."

To prove every dog has his day, the humane society brings in animals to the party in hopes that they might be adopted on the spot.

"We couldn't have a nicer family and friends that are supporters of the humane society," said Susie Soule, director of the Southeast Volusia Humane Society. "They're concerned about us all year long."

Ace Florida Warehouse Manager Bill Vining and his wife do their doggone best to attend every year.

"The Ropps all have big hearts, especially when it comes to animals. A few years back they started collecting food and supplies for the animal shelter. This year the food pile was chest high, four to

five feet deep and eight to ten feet long. We always bring a 50 pound bag of dog food. The folks at the shelter really do appreciate the supplies," Vining said.

And the animals aren't the only ones needing doggie bags. Ropp said the people food this year included over 300 pounds of meat barbecued on-site, conch fritters, shrimp and more. To eliminate the potential catastrophe of inadequate table space, they put the service racks up and lay plywood on them for a makeshift serving area.

This year's party was in memory of Ralph, the shop cat who is now wandering the catacombs in the sky. Ralph had been the initial inspiration for the food collection idea.

"Everybody just adored him," Ropp said of the feline who had been a part of

their lives for 23 years.

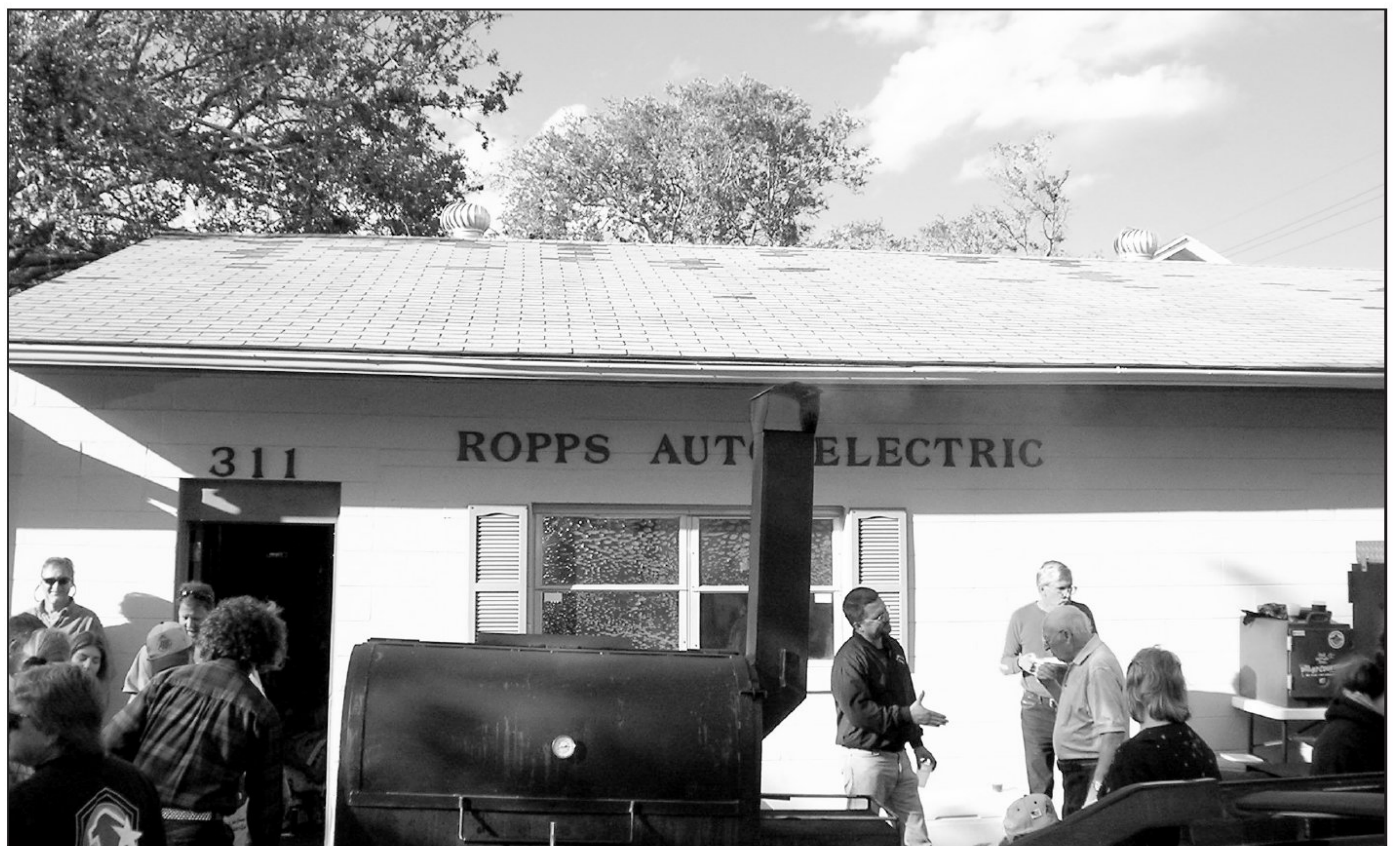
Ropp said the donation tradition has confirmed this dogma: "People always want to do good. Sometimes you just need to give them a place to do it."

Definitely an idea to dog-ear.

Game time! Find the 24 references to animals, cats and/or dogs in the story (parts of words, phrases, etc).

See references below.

References: Doggone, Traci Mutt, animal-
ed, catalyst, dogged efforts, pet food, pet
food, catapult, animosity, every dog has his
day, animals, spot, doggone best, animals,
animal shelter, dog food, animals, doggie
bags, catastrophe, shop cat, catcombs,
feline, dogma, dog-ear.
In the spirit of the game the staff writer's
name was intentionally changed from Matt
to Mutt.



The holiday spirit, blue skies and mouthwatering barbeque draw the New Smyrna Beach community to Ropps Automotive Electric's annual Christmas Party.



Susie Soule (center), director of the Humane Society is all too happy to help load the trucks with dog food donations.