

# Pet Friendly Real Estate Fulfills a 'Furry' Important Need

## ***Meet a Realtor Who is Helping Pets and the People Who Love Them***



By Alissa Wolf, About.com Guide

As a result of the record number of home foreclosures and people forced to relocate due to job losses and other financial reverses, as well as natural disasters like hurricanes, pets now present a huge challenge within the real estate market.

Many people are sadly forced to give up their pets when they move due to the lack of rental properties, condos and other real estate concerns that do not accept companion animals.

That's why a Naples, Fla.-based real estate agent and animal lover named Rhona Sutter decided to launch [The Pet Realty Network](#) , along with the complimentary Pet Friendly Rental Properties and Pet Friendly Resource Directory websites, which are dedicated to helping pet owners find pet-friendly real estate and to connect them to agents who specialize in this market, not just in Florida but nationwide and around the world.

Here's how this all came about.

### **A Dogged Pursuit of Real Estate for Pet Parents**

Sutter, who's originally from the UK, is a long-time Florida real estate agent who specializes in the high-end investment market. She is also mom to Pimms, a chocolate Lab, and mixed breed pooch Pressie, both of whom she adores.

(FYI: Pimms serves as director of 'barketing' and web guru; Pressie is director of customer relations and 'target marketer extraordinaire'.)

After witnessing the devastating effects of hurricanes Katrina and Wilma, and then the latter real estate bust which resulted in many people being separated from or forced to give up their pets, Sutter decided to find ways to help people and their pets find new homes.

"There were so many people looking for pet-friendly properties, whether they had a dog, cat , horse or parrot ," she said. "We got so many calls from people who were leaving their homes and couldn't take their pets. Then there were the foreclosures and short sales. People from all over the state were phoning us to ask what to do with their animals. It was heartbreaking."

The Pet Realty Network provides comprehensive info and resources for the periods before, during and after a move. In addition to helping people find pet-friendly domiciles, there's relocation info (moving companies, pet-friendly hotels and such), and listings of pet stores and service providers available in one's new location, and more.

### **It All Started with Pet Health Insurance**

All of these resources operate under the auspices of Pet Protect® , a pet insurance company that Sutter started back in 1997 during a break from real estate. She eventually sold the company and went back to real estate. But she didn't abandon her desire to help animals and the people who love them.

"I realized I had many connections in the pet world," she said. "I thought of ways I could develop (services) for real estate and pets. I came up with the Pet Real Estate Network" In addition, in 2006 she launched a nonprofit group called PetHealthAlert.com , which provides medial ID tags and the services of a National Pet Health Registry. The concept was inspired by natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina; they are also available for healthy pets; and the service is free.

"When we (she and her colleagues) saw the Katrina situation and what happened with all the animals, we wanted to help, but we couldn't get down there," Sutter said. "That's when we set up Pet Health Alert.com. The pet owner pays the shipping, handling and processing fee and we give them access to the National Pet Registry, which is free."

In addition, Sutter and company recently launched a site called My Pet's Yearbook. This is a social networking site specifically for pets that's also free. "We did this as a giggle," she said. But on a more serious note, the site does contain a Lucky Day feature, whereby pet shelters and others trying to find homes for pets that are in need of adoption can create pages for them that showcase them.

"We are not trying to be Petfinder," Sutter said. "We are just trying to be more personalized. Even neighbors who find pets that have been left behind can create their own page saying that they are adoptable."

### **Pet-Friendly Real Estate is Growing**

One thing that's for certain is that this has become a spinoff pet market that is very much in demand. Indeed, an increasing number of realtors are becoming aware of this, and making a concerted effort to get on the pet-friendly bandwagon.

"More and more people are moving with their pets, whether they're buying, selling or renting," Sutter said. Not only is this a valuable service, she added, "It's so much fun!"