

# Colorado Pet Pantry

INSIGHTS INTO COLORADO'S BUSINESS COMMUNITY

**THIS NONPROFIT  
HELPS KEEP PETS AND  
FAMILIES TOGETHER  
AND DISTRIBUTES  
PET FOOD TO  
THOSE IN NEED**



PHOTO: LAUREL MONTGOMERY

**A FEW YEARS AGO**, Anthony Valle's career was booming. With a doctorate in business administration and years of experience as a successful senior project manager for numerous Fortune 500 companies, his skills were in demand. So when he was offered a lucrative contract to work in Denver, he drove from New York with his wife, young daughters and their beloved dogs to the Centennial State.

But fortune can be fickle. A week after arriving, Valle found himself unemployed due to legal wrangling between his employer and another company.

Suddenly job offers dried up; aside from managing one major fiber-optic project, he hasn't found work in his field for two years. Instead, he maintains a low-income job to help keep his family afloat until something more promising pans out. "I've never seen anything like it," Valle said. "We went from having a beautiful home to living in a hotel. It's been a really hard road."

The Valles have stayed close throughout their hardships—both with one another and with their dog, Cleo. The American Staffordshire Terrier is a registered emotional support dog who loves

to snuggle, take walks and sleep in bed with Valle's daughters every night. But due to allergies, Cleo needs special dog food, which became increasingly challenging to provide. "It would have been extremely devastating to every one of us if we would have had to give up Cleo because we couldn't afford to take care of her," Valle said.

Fortunately, the Colorado Pet Pantry stepped in. The nonprofit, founded in 2013 by marketing consultant Eileen Lambert, helps keep pets in the families that love them by providing dog and cat food to people in need. "Eileen has brought us peace of mind," Valle said. "We're sure that Cleo's going to be healthy and taken care of."

Lambert conceived the idea for Colorado Pet Pantry after hearing a news report on the radio about a pet food bank for homeless and low-income people in Atlanta. "The light bulb just went on,"

STORY: JEN REEDER

she said. “I don’t want to see anyone suffering—animals or people—and I don’t want humans to have to even consider losing an animal that’s part of their family.”

Her idea was greeted warmly by many in the local nonprofit community. Peter Mason, a former colleague from Water For People who is now executive director of Edge of Seven, encouraged her to pursue the idea and offered to join the board of directors (he currently serves as president). Then Lambert met Greg Pratt, executive director of Bienvenidos Food Bank, and he suggested partnering together. In June of 2013, the Colorado Pet Pantry distributed pet food to the public in conjunction with a Bienvenidos event, and the model for Lambert’s vision was born.

Services have expanded rapidly since then. Currently the Colorado Pet Pantry distributes pet food to the public at eight different “human” food banks in metro Denver and Boulder each month; offers “mini foodbanks” at low-income housing communities, such as homes for people with disabilities or the elderly; and provides emergency food services through rescue organizations like the Dumb Friends League and Denver Animal Shelter.

In 2016, Colorado Pet Pantry distributed approximately 63,000 pounds of pet food—more than 31 tons—to help feed over 6,000 cats and dogs. “None of this would be possible if we didn’t have just terrific partners,” Lambert said. She credits the dedication of around 75 volunteers who not only assist at food banks, but in the warehouse and with picking

up food from collection bins at 50 local pet stores. Pet food companies and distributors like Monarch Pet Supply donate around \$200,000 of food each year, which is augmented with financial donations from groups like Healthy Paws Pet Insurance and Animal Assistance Foundation.

Lambert hopes to continue to expand Colorado Pet Pantry’s services; she’s set the ambitious goal of serving 11,000 pets in 2017.

Pratt, of Bienvenidos Food Bank, which has served Northwest Denver for over 40 years, said partnering with Colorado Pet Pantry has helped keep families intact in emergency situations. Prior to the partnership, clients would sometimes ask Bienvenidos to serve tuna or canned chicken so they could feed their cats, since food stamps can’t be used to buy pet food.

Pratt said he often shares Colorado Pet Pantry’s phone number with people in crisis, and that there is a tremendous need for its services.

“What Eileen did was smart; she did not try to reinvent the wheel,” Pratt said. “I hope she is able to expand this. It would be great if there was a pet pantry connected with every food pantry.” **CE**

*Award-winning journalist Jen Reeder is president of the Dog Writers Association of America. She has written about pets for Family Circle, Modern Dog, The Christian Science Monitor, The Dallas Morning News, AKC Family Dog and The Huffington Post, among other publications.*

## THE DETAILS

### COLORADO PET PANTRY

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**1** AN ANIMAL “CLIENT” WITH SOME OF THE MANY DONATIONS THE NONPROFIT RECEIVES  
**2** VOLUNTEERS NORAH, DIANN AND DINA HELP RUN THE ORGANIZATION  
**3** COLORADO PET PANTRY FOUNDER EILEEN LAMBERT



PHOTO: EILEEN LAMBERT



PHOTO: MATT KAUNE