

# Animal Lovers Work Together With McKee Jacó

By Mitzi Stark

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When Katja Bader arrived in the central Pacific beach town of Jacó in 1999, she was saddened to see so many dogs roaming the streets, most in bad condition. There were also sick and starving cats and abandoned kittens left on their own. A few years later, unknown people or businesses put out poison to eliminate the strays, leaving the area, including the beaches, covered with dead animals.

A lifelong animal lover who had pets in her native Poland and in Germany, where she lived most of her life, Bader believes in helping others, both people and animals. When she saw the situation in Jacó, she knew she had to "do something." That "something" led to the *Asociación Pro Bienestar Animal*, a McKee Project group to spay and neuter animals at a reasonable cost and to end the suffering of companion animals, mostly dogs and cats but not leaving out horses, rabbits and other animals.

Doris Schluckebier came to Costa Rica with her husband in 2000 and was affected by the scenes of dogs and cats wandering the streets, looking for food and a shady place to rest. She, too, began taking in animals and helping out.

Patricia Johnson came from the United States around that time and began taking in abandoned puppies and kittens and administering first aid to many poor-looking creatures.



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Each worked on her own until 2003, when an incident led Bader to form a McKee group. She saw a car hit a dog and just drive away – another case of "do nothing." She took on the dog's care, paid his veterinary bills and named him Bruno. Bader then realized that many dogs and cats are victims of accidents and neglect, and that they need as much help as they can get.

"I knew there were people here helping the animals, but we had to get organized," she said. So, organized they got.

Since then the group has grown to include about a dozen volunteers and has spayed and neutered thousands of dogs and cats through



Photo courtesy of McKee Jacó

castration campaigns and castration days at its clinic. It has provided medical help for skin infections, parasites, injuries and other problems, paying part or all of the cost for street animals and pets from poor homes. It has cared for abandoned and sick animals until they were healthy and active and could be adopted, and it has found homes for more than 1,000 animals.

The group has held one-day spay-neuter clinics in such unlikely places as a funeral parlor, a front porch and a village school, and has spayed and neutered up to 81 cats and dogs in one day.

It has held fundraisers and solicited money to relieve the volunteers' own pocketbooks of the burden of all the expenses – though a lot still flows from there. It has put flyers all over town to announce spay-neuter dates and pets for adoption. It is educating the public to provide good care for their pets.

And it has worked: Jacó is a different place for animals today.

"It was a tragedy before. You no longer see packs of wild dogs roaming around," said Chris Scott, Bader's husband. "And Katja knows all the dogs. They all have names."

Johnson said people who remember the

**For Our Four-Legged Friends:** Left, Katja Bader, founder of McKee Jacó, with Bruno, the first animal to benefit from the group. McKee Jacó does much for animals in the Central Pacific, including holding spay-neuter clinics, right.

situation before tell her how much better Jacó is today, and that it is immensely satisfying for her to have contributed to this change.

There have been some pleasant surprises. Once, an abandoned white puppy came to the group's attention. Not even the veterinarian could determine its breed until it broke out in black spots, just like every other Dalmatian. That dog quickly found an adoptive home.

There is still work ahead: more dogs and cats to spay and neuter, health care to provide, education programs to organize for the schools and public, and temporary shelters to find for abandoned animals. Volunteers are needed, said Bader, whose energy level never seems to drag, even with a four-dog, four-cat family (including Bruno, the founder). Funds, too, are needed; the McKee Foundation pays to train veterinarians in spay-neuter techniques, but there is no money to cover the cost of helping strays or pets from low-income families.

To pitch in, contact the Jacó group at [info@mckee-jaco.com](mailto:info@mckee-jaco.com) or see [www.mckee-jaco.com](http://www.mckee-jaco.com) for information. To find other McKee groups, go to [www.programamckee.or.cr](http://www.programamckee.or.cr).



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