

CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT

# Charleston Animal Society

“Lucky Dog” star Brandon McMillan promotes the CAS Chili Cook-off with the hosts of Hallmark “Home & Family.”



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—Joe Elmore, CEO

Charleston Animal Society’s annual chili cook-off—a signature fundraiser with 6,000-plus participants—had to be re-engineered in 2020 due to new state health regulations and COVID-19 restrictions. With the support of “Lucky Dog” television star Brandon McMillan, the launch of a pet star search for “Rescue Brew Beer,” and the power of the peer-to-peer fundraising platform JustGiving® from Blackbaud®, the team created a virtual chili cook-off with an expanded reach and easy integration with other Blackbaud solutions, ultimately raising almost \$400,000.

## Virtual version of chili cook-off brings the heat with peer-to-peer fundraising

Consistently recognized as a top nonprofit in South Carolina, Charleston Animal Society has worked since 1874 to prevent animal cruelty and more recently established the first “No Kill” community in the Southeast within five years. Through its No Kill South Carolina 2024 project, the number of lives saved across the state has increased by half a million.

The nonprofit’s shelter, outreach, and other programs—which collectively protect not just dogs and cats but a total of 75 different animal species—couldn’t exist without fundraising, and over two decades, the annual CAS chili cook-off became one of the most effective vehicles for generating donations and support, with more than 6,000 people attending the beloved competition each year.

Charleston Animal Society is powered by Blackbaud solutions for:

- ✓ Peer-to-Peer Fundraising
- ✓ Fundraising and Relationship Management
- ✓ Merchant Services
- ✓ Marketing
- ✓ Wealth and Modeling Insights
- ✓ Data Enrichment Services
- ✓ Digital Marketing Services

When new state health department requirements and COVID-19 forced CAS to cancel its in-person events, Sean Hawkins had just joined the team as its first chief advancement officer, and he resolved with this team to keep the familiar chili cook-off on the front-burner by recreating it as a virtual event. “To cancel it would have been, of course, a hit to the bottom line, but also a hit to our relationship with the community,” explained Hawkins, a certified animal welfare administrator and certified fundraising executive.



## Enhancing the Fundraising Experience

Hawkins had the advantage of video production experience, having previously owned Unleashed Public Relations in Los Angeles, which created and produced the Hero Dog Awards® for American Humane Association and Hallmark Channel. But a critical ingredient for the new virtual cook-off would be finding the best peer-to-peer fundraising platform for CAS to meet the moment.



181

new donors initially acquired through JustGiving from Blackbaud peer-to-peer fundraising—most through the CAS virtual chili cook-off

After investigating several options, Hawkins and his team selected JustGiving from Blackbaud, which he said offered “gorgeous” graphics and layouts in its related custom-build packages, plus the advantages of easy integration with other Blackbaud solutions CAS relies on, including Blackbaud Raiser’s Edge NXT for fundraising and relationship management.

Thanks to that integration, the CAS team could seamlessly tap into their database and use email marketing to steer their constituents to the JustGiving microsite created for the virtual chili cook-off by Blackbaud. That content included video segments produced with the “Lucky Dog” star Brandon McMillan. From the site, visitors could easily donate, form a cook-off team and recruit friends and family to join them in support.

“JustGiving from Blackbaud makes it simple for donors to sign-up to fundraise, preventing the drop-off that happens when they have to go to multiple pages,” said Kristen Lewis, CAS director of donor relations and reporting. “It also stores their information, making it even easier for them to sign-up and fundraise for future events.”



A search for a Rescue Brew “spokesdog” and “spokescat” generated extra interest in the cook-off.

## Saving Animals Together

CAS kept the competitive spirit of the chili cook-off alive with fundraising teams as well as celebrity chefs and a search for a spokesdog and spokescat to be featured on a local brewer’s “Rescue Brew Beer.” The campaign attracted national support, thanks to promotions by McMillan and the Hallmark channel.

The campaign culminated with a two-hour Facebook live virtual event that was also aired on a local TV news outlet’s social media.



With sponsorships and 2,856 donations, the chili cook-off raised nearly \$400,000—without in-person event expenses—to support Toby’s Fund, which treats injured animals at CAS. And thanks to the integration of JustGiving with Blackbaud Raiser’s Edge NXT, staff didn’t have to design custom imports or spend hours matching donors to pre-existing records in the database.

“All the donor information was pushed straight through into Raiser’s Edge NXT from JustGiving seamlessly for us,” said Hawkins.

With JustGiving from Blackbaud, CAS acquired 181 new donors in 2020, largely through the virtual peer-to-peer fundraising pages that individuals and teams used to fundraise on behalf of CAS during the chili cook-off. The platform also allows supporters to create their own fundraising campaigns for CAS. In either case, JustGiving’s integration with other Blackbaud solutions has made it simple for CAS staff to manage the flow of their supporters’ peer-to-peer fundraising with efficiency.

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—Sean Hawkins, Chief Advancement Officer

## More Ways Blackbaud Solutions Work for CAS

### BLACKBAUD RAISER’S EDGE NXT®

Each month, Charleston Animal Society uses Blackbaud Raiser’s Edge NXT to send approximately 18 emails to its full contact list of over 61,000 constituents.

“We also frequently send segmented email updates and promotions to smaller constituent lists, like weekly updates to our 2,441 volunteers and monthly rescue stories to our 398 recurring donors,” reported CAS Digital Marketing Manager Jessica Whatley. “I constantly watch our email performance analytics to gauge audience perception of email frequency and content. This allows us to optimize how, when, and what we send to our constituents,” she said.

### RESEARCHPOINT™

Using wealth and predictive modeling insights from Blackbaud, CAS developed a target list of nearly 5,000 high-priority donors within ResearchPoint, a powerful database solution for prospect research. As a result, CAS can engage their best donor prospects, even though they don’t have a dedicated research team.

“Every other week, we email 300 to 400 of these constituents to invite them to the Behind-the-Scenes Tours at our North Charleston facility. These targeted emails have had a tremendous average open rate of 34%,” Whatley said. Those who attend the tours are invited back for the Lifesavers Luncheon in December. “ResearchPoint ensures that our messages are reaching the right people.”



“The benefits of using JustGiving from Blackbaud are numerous,” Lewis said. “One of the best benefits is that we receive weekly deposits for donations through JustGiving’s integration with Blackbaud Merchant Services®, preventing us from having to wait a month or more to receive the necessary funds to further our lifesaving efforts.”

President and CEO Joe Elmore is thankful for the role that JustGiving from Blackbaud played at a critical moment for CAS. “The JustGiving website gave us so much flexibility to do what we needed to do to save these animals,” he said.

CAS has been a customer of Blackbaud’s since 1996, and with the nonprofit located close to Blackbaud’s World Headquarters in Charleston, a strong relationship has evolved with many Blackbaud employees volunteering, donating, and adopting animals with CAS. Moving forward, they will continue to build on their successful collaboration with peer-to-peer fundraising as CAS creates what will become a new signature event—Celebrity Paws in the Park—with JustGiving from Blackbaud.

“Blackbaud is always there for us,” Elmore said. “Wow—the things we’ve achieved together!”



The CAS Disaster Response Team helps lead emergency efforts across the Southeast.

Change lives with peer-to-peer fundraising.

[Learn more](#)

#### About Blackbaud

Blackbaud (NASDAQ: BLKB) is the world’s leading cloud software company powering social good. Serving the entire social good community—nonprofits, higher education institutions, K–12 schools, healthcare organizations, faith communities, arts and cultural organizations, foundations, companies, and individual change agents—Blackbaud connects and empowers organizations to increase their impact through cloud software, services, data intelligence, and expertise. Learn more at [www.blackbaud.com](http://www.blackbaud.com).