

Fr. Quarter resident heads to US for animal welfare course

MARIGOT-St. Martin's Francisco "Tito" Webster departs for Boise, Idaho, USA, this coming Sunday to take part in a one-week animal shelter practical training course organised by Humane Society International.

This is believed to be the first time a local has been chosen to follow an overseas training course in

the animal welfare sector. Webster (30) will also visit Animal Care Expo 2009 in Las Vegas from April 5-9.

Humane Society International is funding Webster's two-week trip to the USA.

Webster is no beginner to animal welfare having worked with animals since he was 16 years old. He worked with Lynne Coffin for 12 years at the former

animal shelter at Le Galion until its closure; he served as a veterinary assistant to Dr. Swanson; and did a stint with the government-run dog pound.

Webster is currently employed at Butterfly Farm and is Vice-President of the I Love My Island Dog Association.

He was selected as a candidate for the course fol-

lowing visits to St. Martin in the past year by Humane Society International representatives. Webster was instrumental in escorting the officials around, and advising them of the problems that exist on the island with animal welfare.

He learned of his selection for the course from association president, Ursula Oppikofer.



Francisco "Tito" Webster

"I'm excited, but nervous at the same time," said Webster ahead of his first visit to the USA. "I was originally supposed to leave on April 5, but they have brought it forward by a week. I'm ready. It's going to be a very interesting course."

Webster will learn all about how animal shelters are run in the USA, as well as quarantine procedures, spay and neuter programmes, diseases, vaccinations, and adoption processes.

His course will coincide with the future opening of a bona fide shelter on the French side which has received help and support from Humane Society International through I Love My Island Dog Association. It is envisaged that Webster will be the supervisor. The Collectivité has pledged

50,000 euros towards the shelter's construction.

"We are very appreciative and very lucky to have received help with the shelter plans from Humane Society International, and for the opportunity given to Tito Webster," said Oppikofer.

She said she was thrilled at the prospect of Webster attending the course and hoped it would be an inspiration to other St. Martiners to follow in his footsteps and become interested in animal welfare.

"Tito has a boundless passion for animals and a wealth of experience and knowledge in dealing with all sorts of situations," Oppikofer said. "He is very precious to our association and a shelter would not even be considered without his input and contribution."