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**Tampa Bay Resident Concerned About Local Animal Cruelty
works with Tampa Bay PBS Station WEDU to Air Film**

Public Broadcast of Award-Winning Film *The Witness*

***The Witness* Highlights the Dramatic and Inspiring Personal Transformation of
Tough Brooklyn Construction Contractor Whose Heart is Opened by the
Love of a Kitten**

**Sunday, June 28th, 10:00pm
WEDU + Channel 3.4, Comcast Channel 203,
Verizon Fios Channel 476, Bright House Channel 605**

Tampa, FL, June 19, 2009 - Many area residents expressed outrage earlier this month when an abandoned 5-week old boxer puppy was found near death after enduring two weeks without food or water while locked in the bathroom of an apartment in Lutz. Now, thanks to the efforts of Isabelle Tassi, a local attorney and animal advocate, area residents will have a chance to view an award-winning documentary that teaches valuable lessons about our relationship with the animals that share our world. *The Witness* will make its Tampa Bay broadcast debut on Sunday, June 28th at 10:00pm on local PBS affiliate WEDU.

The Witness is a film festival favorite. It won six Best Documentary awards from festivals around the world, has been translated into twelve languages, and has been broadcast on the independent film showcases of numerous PBS stations across America. The 43-minute documentary chronicles the unlikely journey of Eddie Lama, a tough Brooklyn construction contractor whose life was transformed by the love of a kitten. Having spent most of his life loathing animals, Lama tells the story of how he made a complete reversal, now devoting his life to their protection.

After seeing *The Witness*, Tassi was so moved that she decided to approach WEDU's VP of Content, Jack Conely, about airing the documentary, and was thrilled when he agreed. She expressed hope that viewing the film will encourage members of the community to renew their efforts to extend care and compassion to animals. As Tassi explains, "There has never been a more critical time to raise awareness about the importance of confronting animal abuse and neglect, especially in light of recent reports of animal abuse in the Tampa Bay area."

Just days after the cruelty case in Lutz, a Bay area mother and son were accused of

running puppy mills in Tampa and Seffner. More than 60 Yorkshire terriers were seized, rescued from what an investigator described as “deplorable conditions.” The story broke just as the county announced plans to reduce spending by \$144 million over the next two years. If the proposed budget passes in the fall, animal services, including code enforcement, would be among the departments most severely affected.

"Features that place heartfelt value on the lives of animals are certainly a step in the right direction," said Marti Ryan, Public Information Officer for Hillsborough Animal Services. "Paws up to PBS for this programming."

Pulitzer Prize-winning Los Angeles Times columnist Howard Rosenberg said: “The Witness is one man’s truth that cries out for mass exposure... may be the most important film about animals ever made.”

“I cannot remember being so moved by television for years,” wrote a viewer after the film’s PBS broadcast in Denver. “Bravo! for offering constructive, positive alternatives and actions that people can take out into the world,” wrote another PBS viewer in San Jose, California.

For his groundbreaking street level education work, Eddie Lama was honored with the Peace Abbey’s Courage of Conscience Award. Past honorees have included Mother Teresa and the Dalai Lama. “In my lifetime,” said Lama as he accepted the award, “I have been both the oppressor and the oppressed, both the fomenter of discord and the advocate for peace, both the perpetrator and the victim. But most significantly, I have been both the silence and the voice. It is the human voice that is the primary tool for change.”

“*The Witness* touches something very deep in audience members,” says producer James LaVeck, “because it shows how any person, from any background, can change. Eddie Lama is living proof of something that we all hope and pray is true, that one person’s change of heart can change the world.”

LaVeck and the film’s director, Jenny Stein, founded their non-profit production group, Tribe of Heart, to fill an unmet need for films that explore the human potential to respond to injustice with creativity and non-violence. Tribe of Heart’s next film, *Peaceable Kingdom: The Journey Home*, tells the story of several farmers whose experiences with the animals under their care have transformed their understanding of the ethics of the human-animal relationship. *Peaceable Kingdom: The Journey Home* is slated for release later this year.

An advance copy of The Witness is available to members of the media upon request. Phone interviews with the filmmakers and/or the film’s subject can be arranged by contacting Tribe of Heart directly at (607) 275-0806 or james@tribeofheart.org.