

Pets seldom forgotten at the holidays

By Ellen Byron, Wall Street Journal

Since Neil, a 5½-inch-long tortoise, already donned a Santa hat and an elf cap for past holiday celebrations, this year Cindy Breninger, a legal secretary who lives in West Sacramento, made a 4½-inch-tall Christmas tree for him to wear over his shell on Christmas morning.

Neil – wearing his new tree – is featured in the family Christmas card. His Christmas stocking, stuffed with a new bag of lettuce, will be placed next to stockings for Breninger's two children and their parakeet.

“Having our pets included at Christmas rounds out our little family,” she says.

During the holidays plenty of people shower their dogs and cats with treats, toys, costumes and even visits with Santa. Now, more families are trying to include other types of pets in their Christmas festivities, including guinea pigs, ferrets, hamsters and rabbits.

About 28 percent of owners of these “small animals” are expected to buy their pet a Christmas present this year, spending an average of \$16 per gift, according to the trade group American Pet Products Association. An estimated 50 percent of dog owners will buy their dog a gift, spending an average of \$10, and 36 percent of cat owners, spending \$7.80 per gift, the group says.

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