

It's a dog's life...WB woman wants to keep it that way

BY SALLY TATO
STAFF WRITER

Jan Smargon is a dog savior. The West Bloomfield woman has rescued her share of doomed dogs on abandoned highways and animal shelter death rows.

Last year, she heard of a bull-terrier mixed puppy that had three broken legs and a bullet in his back. Realizing the dog was not to be euthanized in an animal shelter, Smargon footed the \$4,500 medical bill, and later found a home for the puppy she named Hope.

It's not always that easy though. Recently, Smargon picked up a German Shepherd from a local shelter. The dog was on the shelter's kill list and was suffering from a bone that was out of joint. Smargon took the dog to a veterinarian and doled out about \$2,000 for a bone fusion.

That dog, also named Hope, is still waiting for a home. With three dogs of her own, Smargon knows she can't keep all the dogs she saves. But she also isn't a pro on finding families to adopt her dogs.

That's where Claudia Peeken comes in. A Dearborn resident, Peeken has devoted years of her free time to finding dogs productive, safe, happy homes.

Together she and Smargon seem to go paw in paw. As partners in The Critter Connection, a newly-formed non-profit group, the two women set out to rescue dogs and adopt them out at regular adoption-site assemblies outside of local pet stores.

The next adoption site is scheduled from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Sept. 21 at Pet Supplies Plus, 8036 Cooley Lake Road in White Lake.

Dogs still looking for homes include: Cady, a 1 1/2 year old Pointer mix; Butch, a Shepherd Rottweiler; Fred and Wilma, Great Dane and Husky mixes;



Dog days: West Bloomfield resident Jan Smargon (left) and Dearborn resident Claudia Peeken run a dog adoption agency. The non-profit agency focuses on finding good families for stray and abandoned dogs. The three pictured dogs, (from left), Fred, Bonnie and Zack are still looking for homes.

and four white Shepherd mix puppies.

"I've always loved animals," Smargon said. "That's why I kind of hooked up with Claudia. I was helping dogs out and I didn't know anything about adopting dogs out."

Since starting their business in July, the two have adopted out more than 20 dogs, but still have at least a dozen waiting in foster homes.

Peeken knows they need to get the dogs adopted, but admits that she's in no rush if the right family or owner doesn't come along.

"I'm into quality homes," Peeken said. "I want them to have really good homes, and that's the bottom line for me and Jan, too."

So when potential dog adopters come along, Peeken and Smargon try to make a match.

"If they're interested, they fill out the adoption papers and we review as to what the dog is all about and what his quirks or needs are and we make the families aware of it," Smargon said.

"We know more about their personalities having fostered them."

When a dog-owner match is made, the women hand-deliver the vaccinated and sterilized dog to the home.

That's to ensure the truthfulness of the application. "I don't let the dogs go home on location. I deliver the animals, and maybe not that day," Peeken said.

"Once I adopted out a dog to nice responsible people and I

saw gaps in the gate, and I said I was not comfortable with the situation and I felt bad, but the husband wasn't willing to fix up the fence."

Peeken left with the dog. "It's for the safety of the animal, it's not just for my satisfaction," she said.

She has learned from experience. Starting out

During her formative dog adoption years, Peeken adopted out a dog to a woman and her three children. The woman didn't bring the collar to the adoption site, but assured Peeken that she had it at home.

Soon after, the woman called Peeken and said the dog had escaped. Peeken drove out to the woman's neighborhood and finally

found the dog at an animal control center.

"He got petrified and I took him to the vet, and I was ready to take him back, but she said she was the new mother and he had to get used to her," Peeken said.

Four months later, Peeken made a follow-up phone call to the home and spoke to the woman's husband. When she asked how the dog was, the husband responded that he'd taken him to the humane society four months before and had him put to death.

"It tore me apart. He was just this innocent little thing that wanted love," Peeken said.

At least 34,000 animals in the state, mainly cats and dogs, will go without love this year, said Gary Tiscornia, executive director of the Michigan Humane Society.

Instead, they will all be euthanized.

"Those animals will be euthanized because society in general doesn't love them," Tiscornia said. "That's the sad, and fate of these animals."

When animals come to the society they are evaluated for health, temperament and adoptability, he said. If adoptable, dogs are vaccinated, wormed, de-fleeced and sterilized.

Similar to what Peeken and Smargon do, the humane society has potential dog owners sit down with adoption counselors to go through a screening process and match the dog to its owner.

But unlike Peeken and Smargon, the humane society will not turn a prospective adopter away.

"When our adoption counselors are sitting there, what's going through their minds is this, 'Is this home a better place for this animal than to be euthanized, placed in our cooler and cremated,'" Tiscornia said.

"We're not going to turn you down because we'd rather see that cat in your home than dead in our cooler."

However, the humane society is launching a behavior consultation program in 1997 that allows the adopter to receive professional counseling on how to best integrate their animal into their home, Tiscornia said.

The Critter Connection offers

something similar. And as extra insurance, The Critter Connection will take back any dog that it has adopted out. The \$100 adoption fee is also refunded.

"I stress it and I highlight it. They will get their money back," Peeken said. "I will refund the money because I have a personal interest in these animals."

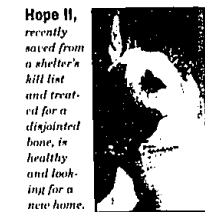
"We're not so much concerned with raising money but with getting these dogs a good home," Smargon said.

"I mean it's hard. We need help."

For more information about adopting a dog through The Critter Connection, call Jan Smargon at 810-626-8051 or Claudia Peeken at 313-563-1823.

Adopt a pet

The animals shown here are all available for adoption through the Critter Connection. Call (810) 626-8051 for more information.



Sweetie has recovered since this photo was taken, but still needs to be adopted.

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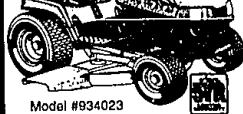
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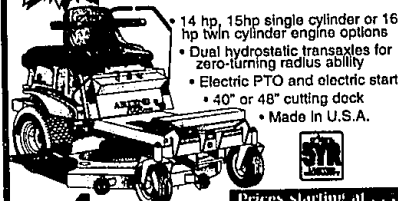
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