

At Petaluma sanctuary, old dogs get a second chance



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Petaluma, CA, USA. Tuesday, May 21, 2019. Lily's Legacy, a sanctuary for senior dogs in East Petaluma, celebrated its 10 year anniversary this year. The dogs, with various situations and breeds, are older dogs that hope to be adopted. This is Spot who is 10 years old and whose owner died. He hopes to be adopted soon. (CRISSY PASCUAL/ARGUS-COURIER STAFF)

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It's been about four months, but it's clear that Spot, 10, is still getting used to life in Petaluma.

His owner died around Thanksgiving, and his neighbors took care of him for as long as they could before surrendering him to a shelter in east Los Angeles. One of the volunteers at Lily's

Legacy, a senior dog sanctuary in northeast Petaluma, discovered Spot online, and the nonprofit quickly put plans in motion to transport him to Sonoma County.

When he arrived, they discovered both his ears were badly infected, and he had “an atrocious skin condition,” said longtime volunteer Linda Mannella.

Spot was soon lined up for an adoption once he was healthy, but it was contingent on his ability to get along with cats, a rare blind spot for the nonprofit since there are no feline residents on the five-acre ranchland. During a home visit with the prospective owner, they tested him, and the sweet, wobbly pooch – whose breed is up for debate – broke into a full-on sprint after one of them, Mannella said.

“He fooled us,” she joked. “He’s still looking for his forever home.”

Spot is one of 13 dogs currently staying at a haven for abandoned, homeless or displaced senior (age 7 and older), large-breed canines on the rural edge of Petaluma. This year marks the 10th anniversary of Lily’s Legacy, a nonprofit that has rehabilitated hundreds of elder dogs, and successfully placed more than 70% of them in a new home.

The goal is to offer an alternative to euthanasia or abandonment by providing the dogs with a loving family so they can live out their days peacefully.

“These dogs have been to hell and back, and they are so grateful,” said Alice Mayn, executive director and founder. “It really makes you rethink the priorities in your life and what’s really important, and not get caught up in the stuff of everyday that sometimes bogs you down.”

The not-for-profit organization is named after Lily, a white-faced golden retriever that Mayn and her family adopted from Sonoma County Animal Services in November 2007. For almost two decades prior, Mayn had fostered dogs and volunteered for a golden retriever rescue service in Marin County.

Lily was in and out of the veterinarian’s office for the four months they had her, but she had a profound impact on everyone she came in contact with, said Mayn, a retired Realtor and inventor of the Countour cold pack.

Over the last decade, every unlikely wish that’s been fulfilled, every mountain-high hurdle that’s been overcome – knowing full-well how woo-woo it sounds – Mayn believes it’s been Lily that’s helped this unique dog rescue endure.

“She just was an angel,” Mayn said. “She’s been watching my back ever since.”

Lily’s Legacy employs two part-time employees and a small army of about 90 volunteers that specialize in different aspects of care – from walking and cuddling to training and physical therapy. On the outside of each kennel in the barn are specialized care instructions and a log to track their daily routines.

Many dogs require additional work when they arrive to alleviate any lingering trauma, but Lily’s avoids dogs that are aggressive toward other dogs.

In the bunk house connected to the main residence on the property, dogs awaiting medical treatment from the Fairfax Veterinary Clinic, which has handled all the remedial work since Lily’s Legacy began, are housed separately to provide them with extra attention until they recover. Potential adopters have to complete a stringent application process with unique qualifications designed to ensure the dog will receive the level of care necessary for owning an elder dog. Many adopters have come from throughout the West Coast, as far north as Washington, and as far south as Arizona, Mannella said.

Adopting senior dogs, many of which will encounter health issues at some point, also requires an understanding that they’ll have shorter lives, Mayn said. Lily’s Legacy provides a wealth of materials to cope, including “A Dog’s Will” and “The Rainbow Bridge,” two scripts that the staff said has helped encourage numerous repeat adopters.

“For people that have kind of been on the fence and I’ve given them this dog’s will, it really helps them process, whether they’re ready to do that or not,” said Mayn.

The nonprofit founder said they're always accepting volunteers and donations, and has been overwhelmed by the life Lily's Legacy has provided her in retirement.

"It's just such a blessing," Mayn said. "I wake up every morning amazed."

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MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about Lily's Legacy or inquire about potentially adopting a senior large breed dog, visit www.lilyslegacy.org, or call 707-787-7010.
