

**PETALUMA:** Lily's Legacy rescues senior dogs in need, helps them find new homes

# A second chance for elderly dogs

By **KATIE WATTS**

PETALUMA CORRESPONDENT

**A**lice Mayn has the “animal gene,” she said, and has been caring for dogs most of her life.

“My parents didn’t know one end of a dog from the other,” she joked, “but I would bring home strays, and they were okay with it. I have a heart for animals and people in need.”

To that end, she has created a nonprofit organization called Lily’s Legacy that rescues and finds homes for large elderly dogs.

Who was Lily, and why is this her legacy?

She was a golden retriever who had been picked up as a stray in Santa Rosa in November 2007. Mayn adopted her and was immediately taken with Lily’s loving personality and loving disposition.

“She walked straight to me and gave me a big kiss,” she said.

They had four months together before infections and illness took a sad toll but, Mayn said, “she had a special nature of peace, gentleness and love.”

After Lily’s death, Mayn’s daughter said, “Mom, Lily was an angel.”

Mayn believes the dog may have been sent to her as just that, and with Lily as her example, she set about establishing the dog sanctuary on acreage in east Petaluma, a place where lost or abandoned senior dogs can have a resting place until the right adoptive home is found.

“Lily came with a message,” said Mayn, 68. “After she passed away, I got the message: ‘Don’t even think about retiring. You’re going to be a very busy lady.’”

She listened, and although she said she now works 15 hours a day every day, she said, “I’ve never regretted it.”

The spacious home seems filled with large, gentle, often graying dogs who are so well-behaved they’re never obtrusive.

The dogs she cares for, with the help of many volunteers, must be 7 or older and more than 50 pounds. Not enough people focus on the special qualities these older dogs can offer, Mayn said.

“The perception is large



BETH SCHLANKER / The Press Democrat

**Alice Mayn is the founder and executive director of Lily's Legacy, a senior dog sanctuary in Petaluma.**

breeds and old dogs are hard to adopt,” but that’s not so. “We had a dog surrendered to us two weeks ago. We had been told it was unadoptable. We had it one week.”

The average adoption time is about six weeks.

Volunteer Sahar Bartlett said they have a rigorous adoption process, and Mayn added, “We’re very particular. We do home visits and check references.”

Mayn currently rents the property though eventually hopes to buy it. She credits her landlord, who lives nearby, for understanding and kindness.

“When you call up someone and say, ‘I want to lease your property and, oh by the way, I run a dog sanctuary,’ most people can’t hang up fast enough,” she said.

Mayn is licensed for 10 dogs, four of whom are permanent, some with health issues. And

though one might think that many dogs create constant barking, that’s not the case at all. One newer dog, Hobbes, was the only barker one recent day, and that was partly because he was settling in, Mayn said.

As the dogs settle in, they’re given house privileges. Dogs sprawl on the floor of the living room and pad in and out.

“Look how easy these guys are, and so appreciative. What they give back to us far exceeds what we give to them.”

As if on cue, Greta, a golden retriever, trotted up, carrying a well-loved yellow toy in her mouth.

Where do the funds come from to maintain the sanctuary? Fundraisers are held, grants are written. Another way is contributions.

“People from all over the country have donated,” Mayn said, “and not always small contributions.” Lily’s Legacy has a

Web page, a Facebook presence and a mailing list.

Close to 30 regular volunteers come to the sanctuary several times a week, and another 30 can be counted on for assistance with special events. Some are younger — Lily’s Legacy has a youth program teaching kids how to work with the dogs.

Lily’s Legacy has taken in dogs from all over the state. Some are kept at the sanctuary; others are in foster care. Although they have foster homes, more are needed.

Bartlett and her husband are no longer allowed to foster dogs. They have four now, and three are former sanctuary fosters, Bartlett said. “But I can’t think of a better way to spend my time than helping these dogs.”

Both agree education is key to changing the way older dogs are regarded.

“Not unlike humans, older dogs come with a whole lot of

built-in wisdom and understanding,” she said.

While it can take a while to accept that an older dog may need extra care and will die sooner rather than later, Mayn pointed out a brief poem by an unknown author that’s posted on her website.

*If I live long enough,  
all the components of my heart  
will be dog and I will become  
as loving and generous as they  
are.*

Mayn smiled and said, “I’m just waiting for my whole heart to be dog.”

Volunteers and donations are always welcomed. For more information, visit [lilyslegacy.org](http://lilyslegacy.org).