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A GUIDE TO THE GREATER FORT MYERS BUSINESS INDUSTRY

Pet business rescues abandoned canines**BY MICHELLE L. START**

Florida Weekly Correspondent

Neglected, abandoned, malnourished and sickly, most of the dogs that find their way to Jennie Curtis and Sunny Lichtenberg have been given up on and seem to have little chance of finding a permanent home.

"Sunny and I put the business together," said Curtis. "During the past six or seven years we were rescuing mostly dachshunds and shelties, but then we got very popular. So, we expanded to take in border collies, shelties and dachshunds. It has continued to grow and now we have lots of breeds."

Initially, it was a side hobby for the women who own K-9s Come First, a training, daycare and boarding business. Now, they are in the process of applying for non-profit status for Waiting on our Forever Families (W.O.O.F.F.), which will allow the duo to accept charitable donations.



PHOTO MICHELLE L. START

Sunny Lichtenberg with a three-legged labradoodle named Tripod.

"We limit what we take because of funds," said Curtis. "If we had donations, a source of funding, we would take in more."

Throughout the years, they have placed between 80 and 100 dogs that likely would have been euthanized otherwise.

Each has its own story. Take Annie, for example. A greyhound, Annie came from the dog track but hasn't been able to find a home because she shies away from strangers. Then there is Tripod, a labradoodle (a hybrid dog created by crossing the Labrador Retriever and the Standard or Miniature Poodle) who is missing a hind leg and came to the women in February after his previous owner tried to kill his wife and landed in jail.



PHOTO MICHELLE L. START

A border collie named Kayl. He was brought to the shelter after his former owner committed suicide.

"It is always through no fault of their own," said Lichtenberg.

When the dogs arrive at the rescue, frequently they need extensive medical care. Curtis said they spent more than \$20,000 in medical care for rescued dogs last year. Most recently the partners spent \$1,200 for spaying, neutering and treating ear infections on Tyra and Felyx, two dachshunds that need to be placed together.

"The dogs stay with us until we are able to find them a home," said Curtis.

Like family pets, the dogs stay in Lichtenberg and Curtis' home.

The women have had Echo and Kayl, both border collies, for some time. Echo arrived with patches of fur and still sports bald spots while Kayl was on his ninth home when his owner committed suicide.

While being fostered, the dogs undergo obedience training and socialization. Curtis and Lichtenberg learn the temperaments of each animal, which helps them place them appropriately.

"The big dogs are much harder to place," said Curtis. "It is a space issue and an amount of food issue. Everything is just more when you get a big dog."

Right now, she is trying to find a home for Tripod and for Emma, a great Pyrenees who came to the shelter when her owner moved to Southwest Florida but was unable to have a dog in her apartment.

W.O.O.F.F. charges a \$250 adoption fee. It includes five days of free boarding, one free class, a certificate, doggy treats, current vaccinations, spay-

ing/neutering and toys.

"We charge the \$250 because we want people who are really interested in having a dog," said Curtis. "It doesn't cover anything as far as our costs. I guess it just makes us feel more secure.

Every dog that leaves here is a part of our family that we are placing."

Before placing a dog, W.O.O.F.F. checks to make sure the potential home has all up-to-date vaccines on other pets, does a home study to ensure appropriate placement and asks families to bring in other pets so the animals can become accustomed to one another.

Additionally, they conduct another home visit after placement and require a contract that says should the family decide not to keep the dog, it will be returned to W.O.O.F.F. ■



Annual Cattle Barons' Ball tickets sold out

Only sponsorships still available

SPECIAL TO FLORIDA WEEKLY

Tables for the American Cancer Society of Lee County's 2008 Cattle Barons' Ball have sold out six months prior to the actual event date.

The fifth annual fundraising event will kick off Saturday, January 26 at the City of Palms Park in Fort Myers' River District. This is the fourth consecutive year the event has sold out in advance.

People still interested in attending the event can invest in one of three sponsorship opportunities that are still available. Options include donations from \$10,000 to \$30,000 with varying levels of recognition offered. For information on available sponsorships please contact Event

Chair Melinda Isley at 274-7736 or m.creative@embarqmail.com.

In its fifth consecutive year, the Lee County Cattle Barons' Ball has grown to become the largest in the State of Florida, raising more than \$2 million in the first four years. Over 750 guests are expected to attend the 2008 event.

"We are truly fortunate that our community continues to support this event and the fight against cancer," said 2008 Chair Melinda Isley. "Many industries and businesses have suffered financially over the past year, but our patrons understand that cancer does not take a break just because markets are down."

Oswald Trippe and Company and First Com-

munity Bank of Southwest Florida have teamed up as this year's Co-Presenting sponsors. Other top sponsors for the 2008 event include John and Mary Jo Boler, The Boston Red Sox/Lee County Parks and Recreation and Scanlon Lexus of Fort Myers.

The dollars raised at the event go straight toward the fight against cancer. Besides funding research to find a cure, including children's cancer research, funds help send dozens of local kids to "Reaching Out to Cancer Kids" (R.O.C.K.) camp each summer, allow families dealing with cancer to enjoy Families R.O.C.K. Weekend, sends cancer survivors to college through a scholarship program, provide rides

for cancer patients to and from treatments with *Ride to Recovery* and *LifeLine*, help women find support and valuable make-over tips with the *Look Good Feel Better* program, benefit prostate cancer survivors who take part in our *Man to Man* support group and much, much more.

With more than 3,400 local offices nationwide, The American Cancer Society is organized to deliver cancer prevention, early detection, and patient services programs at the community level. The organization is dedicated to eliminating cancer as a major health problem by preventing cancer, saving lives, and diminishing suffering from cancer through research, education, advocacy, and service. ■