

# The Times-Picayune

River Ridge woman's home goes to the dogs

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Jennifer Wright loves dogs. She's had them as pets since she was a child, and now she owns three.

So when friend and animal rescuer Melanie Manning introduced her to the idea of opening her home as a foster home for rescued animals, the River Ridge woman figured, why not?

Over the past few years, since retiring as a teacher, Wright estimates, she's provided a foster home for 30 dogs, and she's adopted two: a mixed-breed mutt and a black Labrador retriever. Since Hurricane Katrina, her home has been a haven for several dogs, including a mutt and a golden retriever.

"Dogs love unconditionally," Wright said. "They are phenomenal creatures. That's how you get started rescuing: You go to the shelter, look at their wagging tails and sad eyes, and you get hooked."

Her latest foster pet was Candy, an 11-week-old Labrador puppy, that was housed at the St. John the Baptist Parish Animal Shelter in LaPlace after it had been shot in the leg and was found in a ditch. Wright said she has been assisting the St. John Animal Shelter since the storm, but she also has experience working as a Louisiana SPCA volunteer and trainer of dogs for disabled people.

"Every kennel is clean, and every dog has toys," Wright says of her experience with the St. John Shelter. "Every time they get a dog, they try to find a breed rescue group or a foster home. I have never seen an organization that tries so hard to get homes for these animals."

Wright said the St. John Animal Shelter worked with the 3-year-old Vet Adoptions, an outreach chapter of the Humane Society of Louisiana, to help repair Candy's fractured leg and get her back in commission. Humane Society of Louisiana paid for the X-ray and surgery to remove the pellet from Candy's leg, and Vet Adoptions worked with [Labs 4 Rescue](#) to get Candy adopted by a family in Connecticut.

Wright and Jeff Dorson, executive director of the Humane Society of Louisiana, said the need for pet foster homes and adoptions has grown in tandem with the population explosion of people and animals in the River Parishes and outskirts of New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina. Coupled with the fact that the storm caused several shelters to be closed or relocated, existing pet control shelters are struggling with a volume of animals abandoned before or after the storm. The problem is compounded by newcomers and people who have relocated but are not allowed to keep animals in apartments or trailers.

"This is puppy and kitten time now," Wright said. "The shelter is just full."

Wright recommends animal foster parenting. She said it isn't difficult or expensive. It generally takes only a day for an individual or family to get approved, after completing a short application and passing an inspection to show that a dog or cat can be temporarily cared for and housed. The humane societies and rescue groups provide all the necessary medical treatment. All dogs are given their shots before

entering a foster home.

"Anything we can do to try to get a foster home, we do," Wright said.

And it doesn't require prior pet experience, just a love for animals, Wright said. She knows full-time professional people who are animal foster parents, and many, like Wright, already own pets. On average, Wright said, she'll keep a rescued dog for two to three weeks. Dorson said every animal's situation is different, so the time a person keeps a pet may vary.

Wright said she will nurse a dog back to health if there is a medical problem such as heartworms. Once the animal is well, it is spayed or neutered then given up for adoption. In Candy's case, Wright said she took the dog to the veterinarian a few times, but food was provided by Vet Adoptions.

And, that's the way it generally works.

A silver lining in the dark cloud for the local shelters has been a recent donation of money raised by national animal protection organizations, Dorson said. The Humane Society of Louisiana helped animal shelters such as those in St. John, Assumption and Plaquemines parishes apply for grants.

"A hurricane rescue donation drive was held nationally to benefit the local animal control centers," he said. "We are pleased with that. Now, we are asking local people to step up and provide foster homes."

Wright thinks foster homes are the key to eliminating the burgeoning pet population and euthanizing of animals. Foster homes pave the way to getting animals adopted, she said.

She's found fulfillment in providing a foster home for a rescued animal because she knows that when her time is up with them, these animals are going to a permanent home.

"You're saving a life," she said. "It would just take a couple of weeks to save a life."