

Dogs finding their humans in the Deerfield Valley

By Pam Horowitz

They come in all shapes and sizes. Some are small and fluffy while others are large and lanky. There are purebreds and mixed breeds, mastiffs and toys, but one thing they all have in common is that they are rescued dogs brimming over with unconditional love.

I met Joelle, a four-month-old lab/

no inhabitant was allowed to linger long. According to American Lab Rescue, the south is filled with abandoned animals who end up in high-kill shelters. Liz Morrison, a volunteer from the rescue organization, said that "despite our round-the-clock efforts, only 5% of animals in the south manage to find homes. The other 95% are put down almost immediately because the shelters have no room to keep them."



The Chapman's rescued Lab, Doug.

shepherd mix on the Internet at a site called Petfinder.com, but it could just as well have been

Matchmaker.com because it was love at first sight. Holly Chasen, a friend from Connecticut and avid advocate for dog rescue, sent me the Petfinder link to Joelle.

One computer click and there she was, a bandana-clad beauty already attaching herself to me in cyberspace.

Joelle's joie de vivre expression gave no hint of her traumatic childhood. She was found wandering the streets of Louisiana with her mother and sister. Someone stopped to pick up the homeless furry family and took them to an animal shelter in Calcasieu Parish. The shelter was filled to capacity so

Joelle was one of the lucky ones. She was pulled from the shelter by Morrison and sent to a

foster home in Connecticut

where I drove to meet her. I knew Joelle was "the one" with the first

wag of her tail as she came trotting over to greet me. Her body language said it all. "Hi, Mom. What took you so long?"

I had lost my 13-year-old mixed breed rescue Sedona, named after the shelter in Arizona where I found her. I promised myself that Sedona would be my last dog and proceeded

to spend the next few months after her death in a state of depression. There was a hole in my heart where Sedona used to be and my days seemed endless

• Did you know that 7 million adoptable dogs & cats are killed each year, due mainly to overpopulation?
• Did you know that 25-30% of dogs for adoption in animal shelters are purebreds? The other 70-75%, of course, are loving, wonderful mixedbreed pets, just waiting for a chance to be your perfect new friend.
• In an effort to help people make good choices when they adopt a dog or cat, many humane societies, SPCAs, and pet rescues provide adoption counseling to help match you up with a pet for adoption.
• If you have your heart set on a specific breed, before you check out a dog breeder or pet store, why not adopt a pet from a breed rescue organization? Breed rescues are groups that specialize in a particular breed of dog or cat.
• Don't be fooled into thinking that animal shelters and pet stores are filled with dogs or cats that were discarded because they're "bad." Shelter pets for adoption are wonderful companions who become the victims of family tragedy, unhappy circumstances, or irresponsible owners.
• Did you know that many backyard dog breeders and pet stores who supply the majority of purebred puppies are selling mixed breeds without care for preventing genetic problems? Mixed breed pets have less inbreeding, generally less inherited genetic disease, and therefore overall lower vet bills and happier pets! And the best place to find a mixed breed dog or cat is at an SPCA, a humane society, or an animal shelter.



Honey, Natalie Kriveloff's New York Yorkie.

and without purpose. It became clear that the only remedy for my malaise was to rescue another needy pup. Joelle was the perfect cure and I toyed with the idea of changing her name to Prozac.

I soon found out that the Deerfield Valley is filled with many other such happy "tails." Tammy Scarfe, a Labs4Rescue volunteer from Brattleboro put me in touch with other

parents of rescued pups in the area. Scarfe said she became interested in becoming part of the rescue effort when she decided to adopt a yellow Lab. Her Petfinder search led her to the Labs4Rescue organization and ultimately to Miss Pearl, a Southern belle who had been abandoned in Pickett County, Tennessee.

Scarfe told her boyfriend, "Wait 'til you see him." So the lucky dog was adopted instead and quickly blended into Scarfe's three-dog household.

Wilmington residents Rachel and Keith Rodney also found their new "best friend" on Petfinder.com. After completing the adoption application and a successful home visit from Scarfe, the



Tammy Scarfe's Labs, including rescued Lab Patron.

Like Joelle, Miss Pearl had been found roaming the streets with seven of her littermates but no sign of a mom. The pups were taken to a shelter and quickly picked up by Glenda Campbell, another Labs4Rescue volunteer. Their new lease on life came in the form of a transport to New England where Miss Pearl found her "forever" home with Scarfe.

All of the rescue organizations need foster homes to provide a safe haven for dogs until they can be permanently placed. According to Labs4Rescue, the only escape from early euthanasia is relocation to foster homes in the North. Scarfe, who does home visits for prospective pet parents, decided to add foster care to her rescue efforts. Her first foster was supposed to be a young black Lab from Olive Branch, Mississippi, named Patton. But after meeting Patton, Scarfe quickly changed her mind. "I don't think we're going to foster him."

Rodneys became proud parents of a nine-month-old pup from Mississippi. Like many other canine victims of Hurricane Katrina, Tyrone had been fending for himself in the streets before being rescued and put on a transport to a foster home in Manchester, Connecticut.

The Rodney's already had a six-year-old black Lab named Trixie and decided she needed a companion. Tyrone turned out to be the perfect pal as well as a much-loved member of the Rodney household. "All he wants is love and to be around people," said Rachel Rodney. And while Tyrone came to them with obvious signs of malnutrition, his spirit was 100% happy. Lab and the Rodney's TIC quickly added bulk to the once-scrawny frame.

A click of the mouse was also a stroke of luck for Ann and Mark Chapman of Dover. The Chapmans had rescued a golden retriever abandoned in the valley several years ago. After their beloved

dog died, the Chapmans decided to wait a while before finding another furry family member.

When the right time came, Mark Chapman went to the Web. "Since there are so many dogs out there who need homes, we couldn't imagine buying a dog," said Chapman. Petfinder eventually led them to Dougal, a male



Rachel and Keith Rodney's lab, Tyrone, with the author's dog, Joelle.

yellow Lab who had landed in a shelter in Warwick, Rhode Island. September 11, 2005 found them en route to the shelter. "We wanted to do something good on such a horrible day," said Ann.

The Chapmans have nothing but praise for their rescued companion. Dougal is Ann Chapman's running companion and she claims he has logged more than 200 miles since January. "He came to us totally house-trained and very well-adjusted. He's the ultimate happy-go-lucky Lab who finds joy in everything," said Mark, adding he has no problem with dog hair in his pasta.

Another valley resident, Natalie Krivloff, of Wilmington, decided to rescue the old-fashioned way. Krivloff said she had always wanted a small, portable dog so she decided to visit the ASPCA shelter in New York. Waiting patiently for a new home was a small Yorkshire terrier who had been found wandering in someone's backyard.

Without hesitation, Krivloff decided to name the dog "Honey" and take her home. Krivloff says Honey is the perfect companion and credits the tiny Yorkie with enriching her life. "She also helps to discipline me," Krivloff says, referring to the multiple daily walks that are beneficial for both of them. My 10-year-old granddaughter

Charlotte, who lives in California, summed up the plight of homeless dogs in a recent essay: "There are thousands of animals in this world that are unwanted." Charlotte wrote, "When people adopt these animals instead of buying them from a store they are saving a life." Charlotte's essay also noted the importance of spaying and neutering programs to help curb the pet overpopulation problem.

Internet resources like Petfinder.com have filled a huge gap for pet-seeking people living in remote areas. The site was founded in 1995 by the Saul family of New Jersey who made a New Year's resolution to help homeless animals. In 1998 the Sauls decided to expand Petfinder nationwide and have since found homes for millions of abandoned animals across the country. Deerfield Valley residents like me are a true testimonial to the success of this service. Photos by Pam Horowitz.