

Saving lives four paws at a time

Shelly Schultz, Reporter 9:55 a.m. ET Jan. 7, 2017



(Photo: Shelly Schultz)

ZANESVILLE - Every other Monday, Greg Mahle points his semi toward the south for a 4,200-mile road trip. What awaits him as he makes stops in Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama and Texas, is often fear, anxiety and confusion. Mahle is excited as the last leg of his biweekly adventure finds him northbound loaded with unique cargo.

"It's like being in a trailer full of lottery winners," Mahle said.

They don't know it, but for the 65 to 70 dogs headed to Ohio, Pennsylvania and the New England states, tragedy is behind them and a lifetime of love and companionship is just around the corner.

"Most of these dogs were days away from death but someone rescued them," Mahle said. "It is so rewarding having the opportunity to see once homeless dogs united with their forever families."

Mahle, former co-owner of Brighton Old-Fashioned Ice Cream in Zanesville, began his mission to make a difference in the lives of homeless dogs 11 years ago. Since then, he has logged more than one million miles, transported more than 55,000 dogs to their forever homes and has been the subject of dozens of news articles, talk shows and documentaries around the world.

"For some reason, I am really popular in Germany," Mahle said, as he talks about his interviews on The Today Show, with national publications and even a small piece in the December issue of People Magazine.



Greg Mahle, owner of Rescue Road Trips, has placed more than 55,000 dogs in forever homes. (Photo: Shelly Schultz)

In 2015, Sourcebooks released the publication of *Rescue Road*, which became a New York Times Bestseller. The book, authored by Peter Zheutlin, chronicles Mahle's journey to rescue abused and abandoned dogs from deep south kill shelters.

"The articles that have been written about Rescue Road Trips have gotten a lot of hits from the folks in Germany," Mahle said. "And a documentary was done about me in Germany."

Rescue Road Trips began on a cold night in February.

Mahle's sister, Cathy, is founder of [Labs4rescue](#), a Connecticut nonprofit. On a night he describes as desperately cold in February 2005, Mahle awoke to a 2 a.m. phone call from his sister.

"My sister had a van full of puppies being transported from the south and the driver was too tired to go any further," Mahle said. "Since the transporter was close to Zanesville, my sister wanted me to meet the driver on the interstate and drive the puppies and a complete stranger to her rescue in Connecticut. I thought, this is crazy, but I did it."

Mahle was staring at an uncertain future after the last of the family restaurants closed. He was broke, but he had time. Recognizing a desperate need to move rescued dogs from shelters in the south to homes in the north, Mahle borrowed a neighbor's minivan and began transporting dogs, a few at a time, for his sister.

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With each trip, Mahle grew more aware of the desperation to relocate unwanted dogs from places like Louisiana and Texas to forever homes in New England. He also concluded there had to be a more systematic way of doing so.



Greg Mahle doesn't consider himself a hero, but his canine friends, all rescue dogs, seem to think he is. (Photo: Shelly Schultz)

"What I saw happening was only setting the dogs up for failure - more disappointment," Mahle said. "These dogs were showing up unhealthy, dirty, scared. They weren't adoptable."

Through a series of organized channels, Mahle's mission evolved from one man with a borrowed mini van hauling a few desperate dogs from Louisiana to Connecticut into the nationally recognized 501(c), Rescue Road Trips, with a collaboration of employees and volunteers to help him deliver adopted dogs to their anxiously awaiting new families.

"I have a network of volunteers that meet me at designated stops on my trip from the south to the north," Mahle said. "I call them Angels. There are as many as 50 people who show up to get all of the dogs out and walk them, play with them, groom them, etc. When these dogs show up to meet their new families, I want them to be happy and look good. It makes the transition so much more pleasant."

Instead of hauling dogs rescued from kill shelters in the south to rescue centers in the north, where they could potentially become someone's pet, most of the dogs Mahle hauls today have been adopted and need a ride to their new family.

"About 95 percent of the dogs I transport have been adopted through Pet Finders or some other organization," Mahle said. "Only about five percent are going to a rescue in the north, where they will soon be ready for adoption."

Mahle said most people read his story and envision his mission as some romantic adventure.

"There is no money in rescue," Mahle said. "I got into this because I wanted to help dogs move out of the south where they were just waiting to die and into loving homes in the north. Most days I am lucky to get enough money together for my run. If not for the generosity of people who want to help these dogs as much as I do, I wouldn't be able to stay on the road."

Mahle said he doesn't feel like he's doing a lot to solve the overpopulation problems experienced in the south, but saving the dogs he can is enough to keep him motivated.

"It's like emptying the ocean with a teaspoon," Mahle said. "But on the other side of it is a bucket full of love, so I keep going."

Mahle's wife, Adella, knows his passion, she's lived the consequences of it.

"There have been more than a few times that I have had to look at her and tell her she couldn't go to the grocery store because we don't have any money," Mahle said. "But she understands and shares my passion. She is my rock. I couldn't do this without her."

While Mahle charges a small transportation fee, the amount is not enough to cover his expenses for one trip. He is primarily dependent on donations from individuals who want to make a difference in these dogs lives.

"Somehow, by the grace of God, something always happens - someone always steps up to help," Mahle said. "It's not an easy life, but it's a great life."

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For more information

You can follow Rescue Road Trips at www.facebook.com/RescueRoadTrips/ or contact Mahle at 740-221-2767

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