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By GEMA MARÍA DUARTE

Pocono Record Writer

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina hundreds of animals died, many were left homeless and sick, but Vivian Vega and Marie Costenbader poured their heart to saving as many Labrador retrievers and horses as they could.

From her Effort home Vega has managed to foster about five Labs that were found roaming or left behind in Louisiana.

From her own wallet Vega pays for the dogs' medical bills and food, while she finds new homes for the dogs.

"I figure if you have room for one, you have room for four," she said.

She has been fostering Labs for less than a year.

She currently has hurricane victim Baylor, a 20-week gold color Lab puppy that desperately needs a new home. His brother Tucker had better luck when he was adopted about three weeks ago by Nicole Pyzik.

The pair was pulled from a shelter by labs4rescue, an nonprofit organization that saves Labs across the country from shelters.

But because the high numbers of homeless dogs in the South, Labs have only three to five days to get adopted and the organization must pull the dogs from the shelters quickly.

"Moving them means saving their lives," said Vega.

Vega makes her foster dogs feel at home.

They play with her personal Lab, Lakota, and enjoy her big backyard, in which they run around and play with each other.

She talks to them and cares for them as if they were her own children.

For Pyzik, adopting Tucker was a dream come true, since she made an instant connection with the pup.

She sleeps with her new puppy, takes him for walks and as soon as she gets home from school, she plays with him, she said.

Although the 13-year-old has four other cats, with Tucker by her side she feels complete now, she said.

"I love my new dog," she said. "I'm so glad I adopted him."

Vega expects a shipment of more labs after Thanksgiving.

Marie Costenbader was more hands-on with animal relief efforts when she took off for nine days to helped at the School of Veterinary Medicine at Louisiana State University at the Lamar Dickson in Gonzalez, La.

During her rescue efforts she took care of about 70 horses in barns.

Baby was in the worst shape, with large flesh wounds to both rear legs.

He was washed out when the levy broke and got tangled on barbed wire for five days with no food or water.

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The horse was saved by boat and taken to Lamar Dickson Exposition Center, where about 400 horses were housed throughout the relief.

"I would do it again in a heartbeat," Costenbader said.

One day, during her stay, she went on a 14-hour day rescue.

She went into houses rescuing animals, but some shied away from being rescued, so instead she set up food and water stations for those animals.

As she went into the empty houses, she searched for animals in closets, attics and drop ceilings.

But sometimes, all she found was mold, slime and dead smelly animals.

"All you smelled was death all over," she said. "It was disturbing to see dead animals on the sides of the roads."

But during her stay she couldn't focus on the dead animals, she had to save those who had a chance to live, like Baby.

There was good chance that he wasn't going to make it, but he did.

Going to Louisiana was not question for Costenbader, it was a must.

There was no question about it, she needed to go and she is glad she did.

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