



Right, Lisa Mabrey gives some special attention to a boarder at the Dogs of the Gorge shelter in Goldendale.

Opposite page, job satisfaction comes in the form of a wet tongue.

Touch of Compassion

Goldendale shelter gives unwanted and neglected dogs the chance for a new life

By Jeanie Senior

Lisa Mabrey had a couple of simple but far-reaching goals when she founded Dogs of the Gorge in Klickitat County in 2007.

She wanted to establish a low-cost program so people could afford to get their dogs spayed or neutered. She wanted to provide an alternative that would put an end to the number of dogs being euthanized simply because there was no room for them at Goldendale's small animal shelter.

Three years on, there is spay-neuter money. If dogs are not claimed by their owners after they have been in the shelter for five days, they go to live in a foster home.

Dogs are spayed or neutered, microchipped and listed for

adoption on Petfinder.com, at a price that covers the cost.

The only dogs put down are those with temperament problems that make them unadoptable.

In short, Dogs of the Gorge is saving dogs' lives.

Eight foster homes and a core network of 20 to 25 volunteers help keep the shelter clean, visit to play with the dogs "and love on them," Lisa says.

Volunteers and many others had to shift into high gear in late July when Dogs of the Gorge was called upon to shelter four dozen dogs taken from a dog breeder outside Goldendale.

"I got a call July 24 from Melissa Wykes in the sheriff's department, who asked, 'How many dogs can we take in?'" Lisa says.

The answer, it turned out, was 48: Rottweilers, Doberman pinschers and German shepherds.

Lisa accompanied the rescue team that included Klickitat County deputies Randy Wells and Wykes, Goldendale Animal Control officer Tom Fitzgibbon and veterinarian Marianne Randall.

The team found the dogs starving, existing in filth and heat, Lisa says.

“It was 104 degrees that day, and they had no water,” she says.

Before they left, rescuers were told: “These are bully breeds. Expect to be bitten.” But that didn’t happen.

“We went in there calm, and none of us got bit,” Lisa says.

“None of the dogs needed to be tranquilized. None had to be put down.”

The group, which also included Lisa’s sister Kaye Smith of The Dalles, spent hours loading the dogs for transport back to the shelter north of Goldendale. Meanwhile, volunteers worked frantically to get ready for the influx of dogs: building new pens and play areas, and setting up tarps for shade.

The dogs already at the shelter were moved to foster homes.

When the “bully” dogs arrived at the shelter, “you should have seen their eyes,” Lisa says. “The licking of hands. When they got food and fresh water, you could just see it in their eyes: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. One of the volunteers cried for three days.”

The day after the rescue, however, Lisa was overwhelmed.

“I didn’t know how I was going to come up with the money for shots, spaying or neutering.”

She called longtime Dogs of the Gorge supporters Jan and John Nelson of Trout Lake, who were the first to step up with a cash donation.

Lisa also called Cleo Sterling of the Gorge-based People for Responsible Ownership of Dogs, and a dozen volunteers showed up the next day to help groom and bathe the newcomers, help them get used to leashes, put new straw in the kennels, and show them love and attention.

The Hukari Animal Shelter in Hood River also sent a group of volunteers. Because they had been starved, the dogs had to be fed small amounts four or five times a day, which meant numerous people needed to help with meal time.

All of the dogs have been spayed or neutered, health problems dealt with, and most have been adopted “to such

wonderful homes,” Lisa says. “The dogs were gorgeous. They weren’t abused, just neglected and starving.”

The shelter also has a new storage shed full of donated dog food.

It seems unlikely, she says, that this will be the last pet hoarding situation that will have to be dealt with in Klickitat County because people’s consciousness has been raised.

“When these things happen, people start stepping up and saying, ‘This isn’t right,’” Lisa says of animal neglect.

Meanwhile, the shelter is full, in part because of the bad economy.

“I think a lot of it is people having to move,” Lisa says.

“They’re losing their homes and having to move into rentals that won’t allow animals. Or they’re having to pick between their kids’ needs and dog food and vet bills.”

Lisa and Dogs of the Gorge have talked with the city of Goldendale about expanding what she refers to as “our humble shelter,” a 1970s pole building that has air conditioning and heat but lacks rest room facilities and most other amenities.

What’s needed, she says, is a facility at least twice as large. She is hoping the rescue near Goldendale, which put the shelter and Klickitat County in the limelight, will focus on the need to expand the shelter through targeted giving and perhaps a capital campaign, along with donated time and financial support from the city and the county.

“We just want a new building for these wonderful animals,” Lisa says.

Dogs of the Gorge receives no monetary support from the city or the county. Operating money comes from donations and fundraisers: the annual Spay-ghetti and No-balls dinner, held at the Senior Center in Goldendale; a Barking Lot sale at the White Salmon Grange; and the Huckleberry Hound Pawcakes and Wooffles breakfast at the Trout Lake Grange.

The first D.O.G. Walk will be October 2 in Goldendale.

Lisa, who grew up in The Dalles, lives in Wishram with her husband, Jeff, and three dogs. Besides her Dogs of the Gorge work, she is on the dietary staff at Klickitat Valley Hospital.

It is the volunteers, she says, who keep Dogs of the Gorge functioning.

“I can’t say enough about my volunteers,” Lisa says. “We couldn’t have done this rescue if we hadn’t had people in there helping.” ■

