

Saturday, Feb 7, 2009

Posted on Sat, Feb. 07, 2009



## Rescue group hits train tracks to help canines

### Rescue group hits train tracks to help canines

By RICHARD DYMOND

rdymond@bradenton.com

MANATEE —Lulu, a year-old Pekingese and Chihuahua mix, has been blind since birth.

Mr. Muggles, a beagle, is on his way to health after being found to have heart worms.

Tiny, a Chihuahua, was turned in by owners who didn't want him.

Scores of dogs like these — unwanted, aged, beset with disabilities or misunderstood — are often put down.

But Lulu, Mr. Muggles and Tiny, all of whom are ready or will soon be ready for adoption, won't meet that fate due to a spunky 34-year-old saleswoman from Bradenton named Shona Otto.

Otto takes as many dogs as she can from Animal Services even if it means letting them move in with her.

Otto and co-founder Julia Johnson started UnderDog Rescue of Florida in 2005. The pair and their sidekick, Palmetto's Glenda Campbell, operate under the radar of most of the public. They have neither kennels, adoption center, revenue stream or employees.

Yet, using a system of word-of-mouth and online networking, UnderDog has found homes for about 1,000 mostly small dogs over the last four years.

Dogs are pictured on the Web site [www.underdog.com](http://www.underdog.com). Adoptions start at \$150 and include heart worm testing, microchip, vaccinations, grooming, spay and neutering.

"I think we are more hands on," Campbell said. "People can apply for dogs on [petfinder.com](http://petfinder.com) and we respond right away. If we don't have a dog for them, we try to find one. A lot of shelters won't take dogs with medical needs. We don't turn dogs away. They can have heart worm, be blind or have three legs. Every dog we have ever had has gotten a home."

Determined to raise needed money for the dogs during these hard times, UnderDog is going public for the first time today . They are hosting The UnderDog Rescue of Florida Valentine Train Event.

Otto and Johnson rented the historic train terminal in Parrish and the use of a working antique locomotive and open air car to create a romantic fundraiser with the hope of raising \$2,000.

For a \$25 ticket, adults get to attend a wine, cheese and chocolate party in the train station at 12210 83rd St. E., Parrish at 5 p.m. today.

That ticket also includes a clickety-clack, slow train ride from Parrish to Willow and back that will take from 5:30-8 p.m.

A raffle and a silent auction will be part of the fun.

The train engineer is Dr. Edward Dunham, UnderDog's vet.

Once the train is rolling, participants can unwind to the sounds of entertainer Sam Lane, who performs music from the 1940s.

Tickets can also be purchased today at the Popi's Place restaurant, 3911 U.S. Highway 301 N., Ellenton; Bradenton Small Animal Hospital, 1324 17th Ave. W.; Kindness Vet Clinic, 4525 26th St. W.; The Chameleon, 5917 Manatee Ave. W.; or Perks 4 Pets, 6745 Manatee Ave. W.

Tickets can also be purchased at the train station before the event.

"I see it as a relaxing time," Otto said. "I think it's something different. You might spend \$50 on dinner going to a restaurant. Why not put that \$50 to a good cause?"

Otto has six dogs of her own, but, on Friday, at her home on Second Avenue East, there was Lulu, Mr. Muggles, Tiny, Mr. Bones, Pavarotti and a red dachshund named Frankie.

Her other dogs don't blink an eye when a new guest comes to wait to be adopted.

Hearing Otto describe them, one realizes it's not a burden for her to shelter these animals.

"Tiny is a sensitive soul. I don't think he would like a leash due to the way he was treated before. Lulu likes to be outside in the sun. She would prefer a quiet home with a retired couple, where she is not bothered. But she is sweet and loving and really cute.

"My dogs are so used to all of this. They don't blink. Their expression says: 'New dog, whatever!' They never fight."

Richard Dymond, Herald reporter, can be reached at 708-7917.

© 2009 Bradenton.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. <http://www.bradenton.com>

