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Puppy love, and then some: Residents turn out for two pet-rescue events

By Lisa Guerriero/ salem@cnc.com

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Salem - Salem residents showed their soft spot for pets when they gathered recently for two separate animal-rescue events.

On Saturday, Sept. 19, the Northeast Animal Shelter of Salem hosted a celebration of their Pilots N Paws program in an event at Beverly Airport. The shelter rescues pets in a variety of ways: through the usual drop-off process, through their Save a Sato program for strays in Puerto Rico and through Pilots N Paws.

The Pilots N Paws program enlists pilots to pick up stray dogs from shelters in other states that, unlike Northeast, euthanize pets that aren't adopted. Northeast works with other rescue organizations to bring the pets to Salem, where staff and volunteers find them a "forever home." They bring in 10 to 50 dogs per week, depending on how much space they have, through the Puppies Across America program, and Pilots N Paws is one way they get the animals to Salem.

"In shelters in the southern US, dogs are euthanized every day due to lack of space in shelter facilities, if a dog is even lucky enough to make it to a shelter. Dogs are frequently found dumped on the sides of roads, found with injuries — either because they were hit by cars or experienced some kind of previous abuse, or even found dead because no one found them soon enough to save them," said Laurie McCannon, from Northeast Animal Shelter.

On Sept. 19, George Rooney, who pilots private commercial flights, picked up two dogs from the Alleghany Humane Society in Virginia and flew them back to Beverly Airport. Bonnie and Otto are beagle/basset hound mixes, a brother and sister pair that are each about 6 months old.

Rooney is a New Jersey resident who has saved seven dogs in the last two weeks alone, making stops at communities with no-kill shelters at his own expense.

Northeast shelter held a party at Beverly Airport to celebrate the successful rescue of Bonnie and Otto and raise awareness of the program.

Over at the Salem Common, pet lovers gathered that same afternoon for Puppy Mill Awareness Day, an annual event that aims to educate the public about what opponents describe as large-scale, inhumane breeding facilities.

"They may advertise themselves as a family backyard breeder but that can be misleading," said event organizer

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Natalie Femino. "Dogs have one litter after another like breeding machines. They live in small cages for their entire lives, often in squalor and filth. Puppies are sold too young ... and therefore do not receive the proper teaching and socialization from the mama and littermates that is necessary for a healthy and balanced animal. There is no screening for genetic defects, and the dogs are not loved, touched, played with, walked or even let out of their cages."

The event was aimed at pet owners, offering a dog parade and entertainment by musicians Dave Bastien and Susan Van Ham, whose CD, "A Dog'z Lyfe," is a collection of songs from a dog's perspective.

It was also designed to introduce residents to the nationwide effort to put an end to puppy mills, and proceeds went to the Puppy Mill Rescue and Animal Legal Defense Fund

Interested in acquiring a rescue dog, or being a foster owner for one? Contact Northeast Animal Shelter, 347 Highland Ave., at 978-745-9888 or visit northeastanimalshelter.org.

How to help

To learn about local puppy mill rescue efforts, call Femino at 978-745-5288 or e-mail HelpSavePuppies@verizon.net.

Pickering Wharf to host the 'Blessing of the Pets'

The Blessing of the Pets will be held Sunday, Oct. 4, 11 a.m., on Pickering Wharf. Whether you ask St. Francis, the Goddess or the angels for a blessing, bring your companion to Pickering Wharf. Pre-registration is encouraged. People who pre-register will receive a free St. Francis Medal while supplies last.

Sponsored by the Pickering Wharf Merchants Association. For more information contact Nancy Ripa at Living With Pets, 978-740-9663.

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