

# Hound for the holidays: Shelter seeks homes for about 70 pets

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SALEM - Entertaining a large group is common around the holidays, but at one spot on Highland Avenue, this year the crowd will be 70-strong.

Northeast Animal Shelter is expecting an influx of about 70 dogs over the next week or so, who all need permanent homes in the near future.

"Getting all these guys in at once is a lot. Our cages are full at the moment," said Laurie McCannon, who is part of Northeast's development team. "They'll all find homes eventually. But if you've been thinking about [adopting], now's the time."

Part of the reason for the surge is Northeast's Puppies Across America Program, which rescues dogs from other states, and its Sato Rescue, which saves strays from Puerto Rico, where a multitude roams the streets.

While dogs ride in the cargo section of airplanes, they need to be accompanied by a person with the animal's paperwork in order to cross state and country lines.

Around the holidays, with more people travelling, Salem's rescue workers have a precious window to save animals. Northeast is a "no-kill" shelter, which means pets are never put to sleep, which is why the staff and volunteers work so hard to import dogs from out of state and abroad.

Northeast has a list of "regulars" who transport dogs whenever they travel, and they put the word out through flight attendants. But sometimes, there aren't any volunteers, or the schedules and destinations don't match up. Other times, it's too cold to fly pets -- the cargo hold needs to be above 35 degrees to be safe.

Things didn't work out well last month for Northeast, they weren't able to transport any dogs at all in November. The collaborating shelters in other states and in Puerto Rico have been waiting to send some of their animals to Salem, since their policies entail euthanizing dogs that haven't been adopted after a certain length of time.

"They've been trying to hold onto them so they don't put them to sleep," McCannon said.

That's a good thing for animal lovers, of course, but it also means a backlog for December in addition to the usual holiday rush.

Last weekend Northeast brought in three Labrador retrievers from shelters in Ohio, South Carolina and West Virginia, which each has a 90 percent "kill rate."

Since moving to a new, larger facility in May, Northeast can now accommodate more rescues and keep them longer. But even at 347 Highland, volunteers say, the capacity is quickly reached, and the less time the dogs stay caged up the better.



**David Sokol**

Marianna Massa, a staff member, shows off two of Hazel May's new puppies, the first to be born at Northeast's shelter

## **The dogs that need love the most**

Northeast works hard to find "forever homes" for dogs that need it the most, whether because they're no longer puppies, because they come from a place where no-kill shelters are rare, or because their homeland is rife with strays (sato is Puerto Rican slang for a stray).

Some pet lovers may be intimidated by the prospect of adopting a stray from Puerto Rico, which despite being a U.S. territory remains culturally foreign to most Americans. And indeed, some of the pets have a missing leg or crooked ear -- while others are perfectly normal.

"They have so many stray dogs that if they want one, they go get a dog off the street. When they're done with it, they put the dog back on the street and go get another one," McCannon said. "In the U.S., it's different, these dogs are our family."

McCannon added that the ability to care for a pet can be a financial issue in Puerto Rico. "If they have \$100, it's probably not going to go to their dogs," she said.

But no matter where they come from, Northeast makes sure all their pets go through a strenuous evaluation. Whether brought in from a shelter in PR or Pennsylvania, the pets are all quarantined for 48 hours, then checked over by a Northeast veterinarian.

One thing the staff at Northeast prides itself on is placing older dogs in good households.

"Everyone wants the small dogs and the puppies, that's the high demand," McCannon said. "Our best statistic is, we've placed so many adult dogs since we've been here (new location). They don't place them at all in the states they come from."

## **When to adopt -- and when to not**

The folks at Northeast stress that no one should adopt a pet at the spur of the moment, purely out of the goodness of their heart. It's a nice sentiment, McCannon said, but it often leads to a bad situation for pets and owners. Instead, they're looking for people who are ready to commit to pet ownership for the long haul.

One woman recently wanted to give her boyfriend a dog, but the couple was wise enough discuss it beforehand, said McCannon. The woman blindfolded her boyfriend and walked him into the shelter to meet his new pet in person, an idea the staff thought was both adorable and practical for master and dog.

For the same reason, like many pet rescue agencies, Northeast discourages people from surprising loved ones with a pet as a gift, especially with children. Animals make fine gifts, they say, but it's important for the recipient to meet their pet first and make sure it's a good match, and one that can last. They also recommend adopting a pet before or after the peak of the holidays, as it can be tough on animals when a family travels or entertains a lot of company.

"That can be stressful on a new pet," McCannon said, adding, "The dogs are safe here because we're no-kill."

*Northeast Animal Shelter needs to find homes for dogs, and they also need people willing to transport animals on plane and car rides. If you're interested in helping out, call 978-745-9888 or stop by the new location at 347 Highland Ave.*

## **URL:**

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