

Rescue group is imperiled dogs' best friend here / Since its start in May, 150 animals have been saved by Scout's Honor

By ALLAN TURNER, STAFF

You have heard of dogs bejeweled and ribboned, swank hounds swaggering down the street in designer duds, rejecting all but the finest fare. But know in advance, Scout's Honor isn't about them.

It's about those other dogs and cats, the luckless, the abandoned, sick or tortured, who struggle simply to survive. It's about those animals that would wish - if animals were capable of wishing - simply to die and be done with the pain.

Since its start in May, the Houston volunteer group has rescued at least 150 animals from extreme peril. More than 100 of them have been placed in loving homes. But even with the success of Scout's Honor and similar volunteer groups around the city, the need is never met. "There's a need for 100 groups to do this in the Houston area," said President Dana Dicker. "There are just more animals than there are rescuers."

Scout's Honor, named after a rescued spaniel mix who did not survive, consists of six core members and a citywide network of volunteers and temporary caretakers.

The group's founders, Dicker said, previously worked with other rescue groups, some of which were selective in which breeds would be saved. Scout's Honor accepts all comers. "We do not discriminate in breed, age, health or injuries," she said.

A time-consuming effort

Animals come from area shelters where, because of their circumstances, they are likely to be killed. Others are rescued from the streets or, in some cases, private homes. Diligent efforts are made to verify that animals enrolled in the program are abandoned and haven't simply strayed.

"We have a passion for animals," said treasurer Laura Carlock. "We work hard to help animals in need."

Rescue work often consumes leisure hours, and sometimes impinges on family life. One founding member suggested her divorce in part could be attributed to the demands of her rescue work.

Every kiss begins with a slurp



CHIHUAHUAS recently rescued show their appreciation to Laura Carlock of Scout's Honor. The volunteer organization, which has rescued at least 150 animals since May, touts itself as a group for all breeds. STORY ON PAGE B2

"This," said vice president Charlotte Liberda, "is what we do after work and on weekends." Rescues, she said, aren't always planned.

Take the case of Popeye, a dog spied begging scraps at the fried-chicken franchise of the same name.

"I couldn't pass up a dog who was just sitting there," Liberda said. "I made a loop and opened the door and he jumped on in."



LOOKING FOR A HOME: Charlotte Liberda holds "Bunky," a rescued dog that has not yet been adopted.

The nonprofit group works with veterinarians, who provide discounted care, she said. While the organization provides funds for neutering, spaying, vaccinations and medical emergencies, foster families provide food and specialized pet equipment.

Operations are funded through donations. But, said board member Dana Blankenship, "We don't have vats of money," and group members often dig into their pockets to cover expenses.

"I just about broke my bank account with a litter of puppies - a mom and six puppies - who came down with parvo," Liberda said. "That could have killed them. They were on IVs. One even needed a blood transfusion. But they all lived. To this very day we call them 'the miracle of six.'"

Success and tragedy

In its short history, Scout's Honor has chalked up a record of success. A cheerful cross-section of the canine world - rescues all - accompanied the group's members to interviews for this report. And Carlock was preparing to ship an older cat, Chester, obtained in Texas City after its owners were killed in an auto accident, to his new home in Atlanta. Still, rescue work can be harrowing.



A PASSION FOR ANIMALS: Officers and directors of Scout's Honor gather at Cooper Animal Clinic with rescued dogs. Front row, left to right, are Charlotte Liberda, Cindy Perini and Laura Carlock. Back row, left to right, are Dana Blankenship, Dana Dicker, clinic owner Dr. Patricia Cooper and Johnny Hinojos.

"We break down on rotation," Carlock said of the stress associated with the work. "We encounter so much terrible treatment. If we exhausted ourselves with bitter thoughts and thoughts of revenge, we'd be doing a disservice. We just vent to one another. We cry - and then move on."

Among Carlock's cases was Shakey, "a very dear dog" who was rescued from a backyard with the owner's permission.

"The owners had broken his pelvis," she said, "and left him there to die. They would put food on the patio, but he couldn't reach it."

By the time Carlock intervened, the dog, a husky-Rottweiler mix, had a broken leg and severe heartworms.

"He spent three months at the vet," she said. "He was one of those special cases. We could have put him down, but he still had life."

Although Shakey improved and was able to go home, he soon developed lymphoma, a cancer of the lymphatic system.

"We worked hard to save him," Carlock said. "He was on chemo for a while. That did not help. It was too rough. We decided to give him some peace and put him to rest."

Volunteer Cindy Perini recalled the case of Sienna, a dog that she and her husband, John, found tied to a garbage bin in Iowa, La.

"People were throwing things at her," Perini recalled. "They were abusing her. We took her home and she hid under our boat for a couple of days before she began gaining trust."

Perini and her husband also rescued a 2-month-old Labrador retriever that had been tied to a stake. The dog had lost 80 percent of its hair to mange.

Once treated for its medical problems, the puppy was successfully placed for adoption.

Information about adopting animals from Scout's Honor or making donations is available at www.petfinder.com/shelters/scoutshonor.html.

The group also joins other rescue organizations in a "meet and greet pet event" the second Saturday of each month, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., at Cooper Animal Clinic, 1136 Heights Blvd.