

# Rockbridge Dog Rescue Fights Cruelty

By: **Merryn Williams**

The rise in cases of animal cruelty in the United States in the past 10 years is receiving attention by television and print news, and has provoked many attention-grabbing commercials hoping to gain support and a few donations. But what is being done locally for communities like Rockbridge County?

For years, the SPCA was the only program available that directly helped homeless, neglected and abused animals in Rockbridge. Four years ago, the Rockbridge Dog Rescue was created, and has grown, changing the way that our area helps to find homes and improve the lives of dogs in need, the largest victim group of animal cruelty and abuse.

"Our goal was to save as many dogs as we could by finding good homes for them," said Tracy Treen, the program's chairman.

She added, "As time went on, however, we saw an even greater need for spay/neuter assistance, pet retention programs, and humane education." The rescue primarily helps to find foster homes as well as "forever homes" for neglected, homeless, disabled, and elderly dogs in the Rockbridge area. As of September 2014, the RDR had helped to place 16 dogs in temporary foster care, and 76 in well-prepared, loving homes.

The free and reduced spay and neuter program has become very successful as well, and has helped families afford 320 surgeries in the Rockbridge area.

This program helps to save thousands of lives by preventing unwanted

puppies, and keeps even more from ever entering the shelters.

The RDR has also paired with the Rockbridge Area Relief Association (RARA), to provide adequate nutrition to the pets of families going through tough financial times. The program has donated approximately 2,320 pounds of food to help families and dogs in need since it started.

Treen said, "We have a number of boxes set up around town, and dog and cat foods are very much appreciated! I would like everyone to realize that they can make a difference, no matter how small they think their contribution is."

In addition to these major aspects of their work, the group visits local nursing homes with some of the social therapy dogs, such as Red, and spend time with the residents who miss having pets of their own. They also help to provide volunteers to transport blind dogs from around the area to their new homes after spending time at a rescue.

The RDR also has frequent story-telling sessions at the Rockbridge Regional Library, open to the public.

"We read stories from the Mutti-I-Grees curriculum, which promotes compassion and empathy towards animals," Treen said. This

program is used all across the United States to help teach children about the proper ways to care to animals from a young age. The RDR plans to continue this program, hoping that the lessons will influence future decisions regarding pets.

For locals wanting to get involved, there are plenty of opportunities, both directly and indirectly linked to the program. The RDR is always welcoming volunteers to help out on the Pet Food Pantry days, as well as people willing to donate and join the organization. One of the most influential and important things that anyone against animal cruelty can do to help is simply to spread the word.

If you see someone being unkind to an animal, or not being sensitive to animal cruelty, try and help them see why there is a better way," Treen said.

And above all, help reduce the number of pets that enter shelters and never get to leave. Next time you wish to adopt, the RDR encourages you to try the SPCA or local rescues and help out a pet in need. For more information, visit [Rockbridgedogrescue.org](http://Rockbridgedogrescue.org), or like the Rockbridge Dog Rescue page on Facebook to learn about available pets, volunteer

opportunities, or simply to keep up with their projects.



**Herbie, the organization's "masco," visits with other dogs at the Lexington Street Festival. Photo courtesy of the Rockbridge Dog Rescue**