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Pass-Along JL
February 2011

Lab Rescue Organization Success Strategies Part II

by Tracy Granzyk Wetzel

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In "[Lab Rescue Organization Success Strategies Part I](#)," decision making and funding tactics were discussed as strategies that are essential to help to promote and properly run rescue organizations (and thus find homes for more Labrador retrievers).

Infrastructure: Training, Policies & Procedures, and Expert Resources

Preparing volunteers to successfully place the dogs is another key to running a well-respected rescue organization that stays in business. Having policies and procedures in place to ensure the safety of Labs, adoptive families and volunteers provides guidance when having to make hard decisions about which dogs will thrive in a rescue environment.



GRRoW has a strict training program for their volunteers, seeking out world-renowned dog behaviorist, Sara Kalnajs (www.bluedogtraining.com) to help write their training protocols.

"All volunteers who will be assessing dogs for rescue are required to view Kalnajs' DVDs, 'Am I Safe and The Language of Dogs,'" says Lukasik. Training assessments are videotaped, and each volunteer must successfully participate in three

sessions, playing different roles in evaluation of a potential rescue dog. Potential foster homes also have to view *The Language of Dogs* and pass a home visit. All volunteers with GRRoW must pass a police background check.

"Everyone needs to be approved and we are not afraid to turn people down from fostering if we feel it is an unsafe environment or unsuccessful environment for the dog," shares Lukasik.

The organization also does not hesitate to utilize experts in dog behavior when situations arise that are outside their area of expertise. Dr. Patricia McConnell, a Certified Applied



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Animal Behaviorist (www.patriciamccconnell.com) who also speaks around the world on dog behavior and training, is a local Wisconsin resource, and provides a sounding board for the group when evaluating difficult dogs.

Golden Gate Labs attributes their success in part to the way in which they delegate the responsibilities of their volunteers, and the tough screening process they have for adoptive dog parents and the Labs they take into their organization.

“We have representatives who just screen adoptions, those who just assess Labs that are being surrendered and those that only provide foster care, never interacting with the public,” says a spokeswoman for Golden Gate. “We screen adopters very carefully and do not take people who live in apartments or work full-time.”

The Labs themselves are also evaluated very carefully, and someone from Golden Gate must meet the dog personally. If they cannot meet the dog in person, or if they find the dog to be aggressive, exhibiting food guarding behavior or a strong prey drive, they will not take the dog. The Labs that are taken into foster care are carefully evaluated in tandem with potential adoptive families to find the best match possible, ensuring a successful placement.

Sharing experiences among rescue organizations helps make the most of limited resources. GRRoW is very willing to share their success and hosts training seminars for all-comer rescue organization members, hiring professional behaviorists, trainers and medical experts as guest speakers. The fee to attendees is low, and GRRoW's profit on this event is minimal, but Lukasik and her team feel these programs are of great value to the rescue community.

People: Skills, Teamwork, Diversity, and Networking

Lab rescue leadership across the U.S. agrees that having diverse, “real-world” skills among the members of the board is pivotal to longevity. Having volunteers on board with accounting or finance backgrounds, sales or information technology expertise not only helps at the front line, but also opens up individual networks within those skill sets.




Networking in a variety of areas for creative solutions to both business and personnel issues also helps build a thriving team. For example, the Golden Retriever Club of America formed a national rescue committee for their breed, and has connected Golden rescue groups across America. Using Yahoo groups as meeting places, board members and volunteers from different rescue groups can easily communicate, and Lukasik shares that answers to difficult business problems are now only a mouse click away.

Networking through area shelters and sharing successes and failures helps Great Lakes Lab leadership shape best practices. “We are all in this to benefit the dogs and have the same goal,” says Ilg. Ilg also stresses the importance of professional customer service, follow-up, and leaving the public with a good impression of their work. “You never know how someone who contacts your organization can help, or what doors they can open.”

Successful organizations have found ways to negotiate discounts with pet stores, pet supply organizations and even veterinarians to offset expenses.

Despite even the best constructed business plan, personnel turnover in “rescue land” is common, as both the physical demands of training and caring for a Lab in transition can be time consuming, and the emotional burden of making euthanasia decisions can wear volunteers down over time. Leadership of rescue organizations agrees that burnout among the ranks is a pressing concern.

L.E.A.R.N. has worked the reality of burnout in the rescue world into their business strategy, planning for future turnover today. Educating volunteers in order to cultivate the next level of board members for a smooth transition when others are ready to move on is top on their priority list. “You get a group of people who want to do it, and do it well, but after four or five years it is exhausting, both mentally and physically,” says Bauer. “We want the organization to continue even if board members move on.”

For more information on how to adopt a rescue Lab, or how to donate to one of the above organizations click on the link to their website provided. 

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