

From High Kill on the Way to No Kill One Colorado Shelter's Strategy

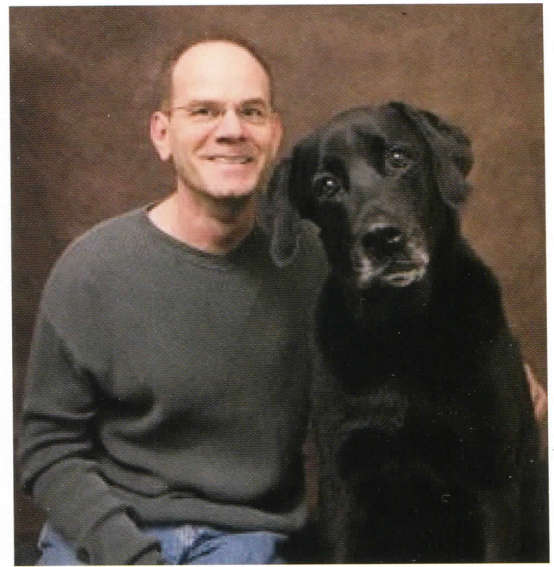
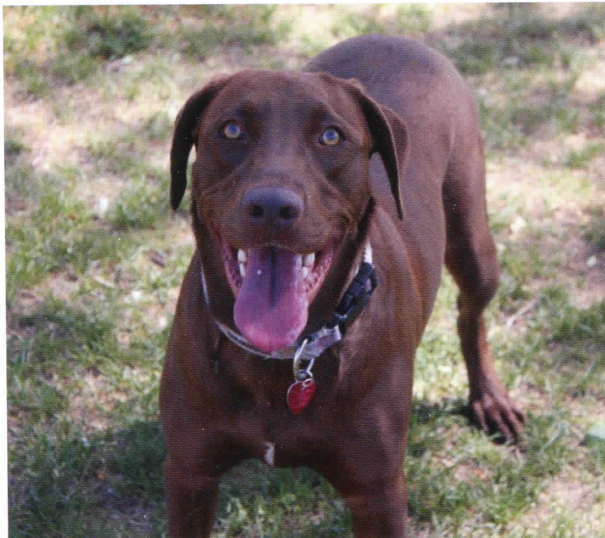
*Article by Jan Evans
Colorado Animal Acupressure
Volunteer: Humane Society of Fremont County*

The Humane Society of Fremont County in Cañon City has not had a good reputation as a sanctuary for unwanted and stray animals. In 2012 the live release rate was 56% which means the kill rate was 44%. Local animals were euthanized to accept dogs from out of state, and found animals were destroyed before the accepted legal hold time had elapsed. After former volunteers reported violations in care to the Colorado State Department of Agriculture, the volunteer program was shut down in June 2013. In short, the HSFC was not serving the local animal populations well.

In October 2014, Doug Rae was hired as Executive Director. His mission has always been to treat all animals with compassion and do everything in his power to prevent the killing of innocent animals.

This can be quite a challenge for an open admission shelter. It serves local communities in Fremont County as well as Westcliffe in Custer County. Animal Control officers bring stray animals to the shelter to be housed until the owners come to retrieve them, and abandoned animals when owners are incarcerated. Owners surrender animals when they can no longer care for their pets or just no longer want them.

Although it's difficult for most of us to believe, many healthy dogs come in as strays and are not retrieved by their owners. Recently a young purebred Chocolate Labrador, that HSFC named Audi, was picked up as a stray. Audi was very frightened in the Shelter environment and started out so timid that it was difficult for volunteers to get her out of her kennel to walk her. After a week, she exhibited fear aggression when anyone walked past her. She was at the HSFC for several weeks after her stray hold period expired, but no one adopted her. When she was transported to a Lab Rescue, she found a home the next day!

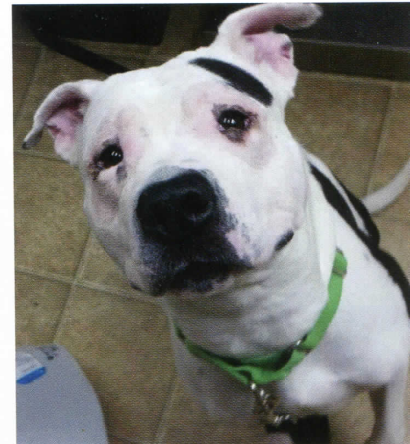
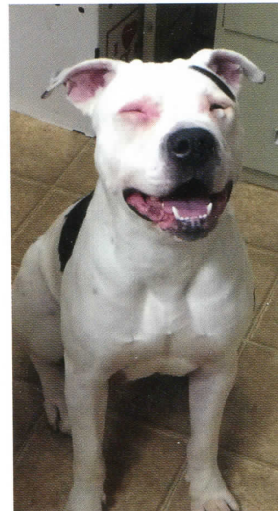


*Executive Director Doug Rae
Humane Society of Fremont County*

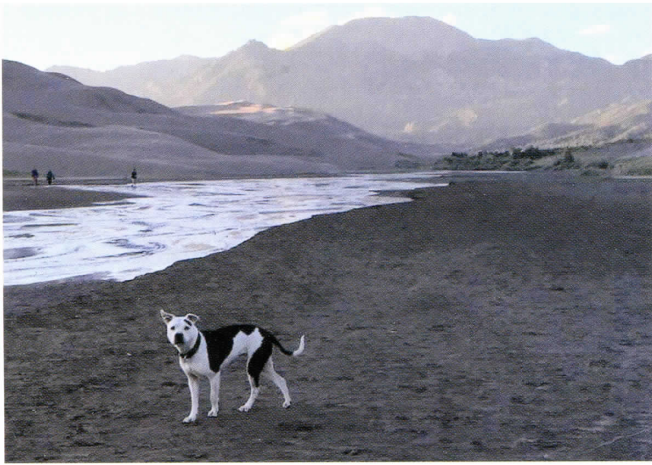
Some dogs have difficult behaviors due to their treatment and lack of socialization. These dogs are healthy but not adoptable because of their dog reactivity or aggression. They need help and behavior modification to overcome their difficulties. In many shelters they are considered disposable or just a waste of money and space – which was the attitude and philosophy at the HSFC before Doug Rae became the Executive Director.

With a professional trainer on staff, many of the formerly dog reactive dogs are now able to go on “pack walks” with other dogs. Staff and volunteers are trained how to deal with various behaviors to minimize the negative.

Ava, a Pitbull, was brought to HSFC by Law Enforcement in September 2014 when her owner was incarcerated. She had entropion in both of her eyes and she desperately needed surgery that cost \$600. The former policy allowed only 2 pitbulls on the floor at one time, so Ava would have been destroyed rather than stretch the veterinary care budget to give her a quality life. Rae's new policy allowed Ava to have the necessary surgery. When she was adopted in late January 2015 her new family took her all the way to Texas for another surgery by a specialist and have declared her “the best dog they have ever had.”



*Left - Ava before her surgery
Above - Ava after her surgery*



Ava on vacation with her new family

Since 2003 Doug Rae has worked at finding shelter dogs homes through Rescues. Rescues usually specialize in specific breeds or types, large or small, scared or aggressive dogs. Because HSFC is the only shelter in a small population/large geographic area, there are not many local rescues who will take dogs and cats. Unlike shelters in metropolitan areas where rescues come through the shelters and pick out dogs and cats that they believe they can place in forever or foster homes, HSFC must contact the rescues—that are mostly located in Northern Colorado—with photos and videos about dogs and cats they may be able to place. HSFC must then transport the animals to the rescues.

With the philosophy that animals have value and their lives matter, insurmountable obstacles can be overcome. It's a matter of searching for solutions – not focusing on what has been done in the past, but looking for new ways to solve the age-old problem of animals who get lost, neglected or thrown away. Shelter dogs are like the old adage, “One man’s trash is another man’s treasure.” HSFC formerly euthanized all feral cats. Because feral cats make great organic rodent control, HSFC now adopts them out as barn cats after they are sterilized and vaccinated.

When some kind people found a young cat who was struck by a car, they brought him to the shelter to see if he could be helped. “Of course,” was the answer, and he was immediately taken to a local vet who evaluated and treated him. He was named Bam Bam, and when he was ready for adoption, the volunteer who had cared for him during his rehabilitation adopted him. Before Rae, the cat would have been euthanized without a second thought.



Mama is another Pitbull who spent a long time at HSFC. She was adopted twice and returned twice due to her dominant nature. She is very sweet and could be walked with other dogs as long as the human was aware of her body language. A Pitbull Rescue in Missouri was finally willing to take her to rehabilitate her to become an emotional support dog. A Volunteer drove her all the way to Missouri in a snowstorm to give Mama a new lease on life. It turns out that Mama is not suited for support dog work and is up for adoption again. If she had been at HSFC before October 2014, she would have been destroyed for being aggressive.



With new Executive Director, Rae, the Volunteer Program has been renewed, and the Foster Program is gaining ground. Many dogs do not do well in the shelter environment and getting them out into homes, even temporarily, helps them in their bodies and their minds.

The 2015 Save Rate at the Humane Society of Fremont County was 94%, and the six month save rate for 2016 is 97%. Transparency and a change of attitude toward the animals has made a huge change in the HSFC.

Although they're not to No Kill status yet, there has been a wonderful improvement for the animals and the community.

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