

On the positive side: Volunteering as an animal rescue driver is rewarding work

By Melanie Brooks

Posted: 05/24/2009 12:00:00 AM MDT

Have you ever been driving down the highway and seen a car with a dog's face pressed to the window? There are two possible explanations. One, the dog is out on a drive with his humans or, two, the dog is on his way to his new foster home.

A what?

Animal Rescue Drivers are folks who volunteer their time, car and gas to drive a dog, cat, bird, reptile or even ferret to a new life. These animals are pulled from local shelters by rescue organizations, vetted, spayed or neutered, placed with a foster home and then wait for a family to come calling. These rescues list their fosters online via their own Web sites and Petfinder.com. Once a family expresses interest, a home visit is scheduled with a local volunteer. If all goes well there, the wheels for transport are set in motion.

The rescue then posts the route through hundreds of Yahoo mailing lists and message boards. Volunteer drivers then sign up for a leg or two. It takes maybe two hours of a volunteer's time on a Saturday or Sunday and, on top of everything else, if the sending rescue is a 501c3 charity, you can write off the mileage and gas.

As a rescue driver, I've escorted a variety of dogs. My first drive was from El Paso to Socorro, N.M. She was a Chihuahua named Claire. She spent the majority of the drive strapped into my front passenger seat either sleeping or looking at me, wondering where she was going.

She went from a breeding machine in El Paso to a happy go lucky life in northern New Mexico with a family who spends their time RV'ing. Had she not been rescued and put on the road with me, chances are she would have been euthanized.

Over the past four years, I've transported a lot of "death row doggies." What are the benefits of doing this? There are many.

One important benefit is for the shelters. A shelter connected with local rescue operations and their network of drivers benefit monetarily by getting the animals out of their system. They don't have to spend money on feeding and housing and they don't have to spend money on euthanasia and disposal.

Obviously, another is that the lives of animals are being saved and being adopted by loving families. It's a wonderful feeling to be a part of a transport like this. The pay off is sloppy kisses and, a few days later, a follow up picture or two from the new family.

If you'd like more information about becoming a rescue driver, head over to Yahoo Groups and type in "rescue and transport driving," including state specific and interstate specific groups. That's one starting point. Doing the same in your favorite search engine will bring up almost 200,000 results.

If you're traveling a long distance this summer and don't mind a furry companion or two, please check it out. You'll be glad you did.

Melanie Brooks is a local animal activist and former Las Cruces DJ and radio talk show host. She is currently a college student and avid Aggie volleyball fan.