

On the Positive Side

Awareness campaign targets chained dogs

By Jean Gilbert For the Sun-News

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Dogs Deserve Better (DDB) is changing lives for animals in significant ways through education and the help of caring people everywhere. The organization's literature employs "chain-ging" to emphasize their mission to change lives for neglected/isolated dogs by un-chaining them and making them members of the family. Since forming in August 2002, DDB has helped hundreds of thousands of dogs get off chains or out of pens through education/awareness campaigns, by providing services to families for measures needed to properly care for their dogs, or by re-homing dogs.

An example of DDB's advocacy is the e-mail networking of Hobbs representative Amanda Barnett and Las Cruces representative Michel Meunier in rescue efforts, transport, foster and re-homing while trying to develop programs and services in their respective communities to address needs of pet owners who currently tether or cage dogs 24/7. The rescue of Brandy is one example in this large and growing network of advocates helping animals. Brandy, a 9-year-old female dachshund-beagle mix, is currently in foster with the Humane Society of Southern NM after coming from Hobbs where she lived most of her life on a 4-foot-long chain. After a period of adjustment, she will be matched with the right family.

The reasons for unchaining dogs and making them family members are numerous. Dogs are social, pack animals; their human family is their pack. So, chaining or allowing lengthy confinement goes against their natural instincts and needs. Denying them interaction or frequent human contact and comfort, impeded by a sentence to a life of confinement, causes enormous mental and physical suffering. When it comes to public safety, chained or penned dogs are 2.5 times more likely to bite or attack because they become protective of their confined areas, cannot take flight and sometimes become very aggressive toward humans. They also suffer from constant exposure to the elements of weather, dying from heatstroke or freezing to death. They become entangled in chains, causing choking or fatal hanging and suffer extreme physical damage or death from embedded collars and chains.

Finding alternatives for chained, confined dogs is DDB's mission. They offer help with the goal to bring animals into their current homes if a suitable agreement is possible with the owner or to re-home animals relinquished to them. Agreements are contingent on resources and volunteer services available to help with needs such as proper fencing and outdoor housing/shelter, availability of crates for indoor housing/housetraining, or temporary foster care to help train animals or address issues. If the owner is unable or unwilling to bring the dog into the home but wants a better life for him/her, DDB will try to arrange rescue, temporary foster, or find a permanent new home for the animal.

The February "Have a Heart for Chained Dogs" campaign is now under way with school children and youth nationwide making valentines to send to DDB headquarters (P.O. Box 23; Tipton, PA, 16684). DDB headquarters then mails these valentines along with information packets to residences identified with chained or confined dogs. Last year, more than 12,000 valentines were sent nationally and hundreds of these came from Las Cruces youth. These valentines are written from the chained dog's perspective and express the importance of love and belonging. Messages written might include, "Please let me in to be with you" or "Break the chain; please don't break my heart." Learn more about the "Have a Heart" campaign by visiting the DDB Web site at www.dogsdeservebetter.com. Join local youth, including the Las Cruces Boys & Girls Club, and submit your valentines to DDB by Feb. 5 for their mass mailing to deserving dogs. Also, report chained-dog addresses to DDB on their Web site or to the local DDB representative.

Finding resources to successfully unchain dogs and bring them into homes is important community work. The need is great in our community, as noted by a citizen identifying five Chihuahuas at a residence living their lives on chains. Such reports are logged regularly in our area. To help, consider joining or supporting local animal groups/organizations that support DDB's mission through education and action. Contact local DDB representative Michel Meunier at (575) 644-0505 or via e-mail at cheressem@gmail.com and the Humane Society of Southern NM at (575) 523-8020. Meunier is also looking for a team of local DDB volunteers to check on chained dogs and learn how to amicably approach owners. Animal Protection of New Mexico has a similar campaign about chained dogs called "Train, Don't Chain." Learn more about their efforts and reporting on this subject at www.apnm.org.

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Jean Gilbert is a volunteer humane educator with the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico and leads “The Snooter Club” and “Critter Connection Reading” programs at the Las Cruces Boys & Girls Club. To schedule pet care presentations at your school or for your club/organization, please call (575) 523-8020.