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## [Cast-off pets get second chance](http://commercial-news.com/local/x44817389/Cast-off-pets-get-second-chance) (<http://commercial-news.com/local/x44817389/Cast-off-pets-get-second-chance>)

BY MARY WICOFF

**Commercial-News** (<http://commercial-news.com>)

DANVILLE —

Ellen Baxter and Pam Kietzmann joke that they're like the movie characters Thelma and Louise. Instead of driving a car into the Grand Canyon, however, they criss-cross the Midwest taking dogs to rescue sites.

"We are partners in crime," Baxter said jokingly. "We're like kindred spirits when it comes to helping animals."

Both Danville women have been rescuing dogs, cats and even horses for many years. When they met less than a year ago while transporting dogs, they immediately clicked.

They share a passion for helping animals, especially those that are seniors or have special needs. Kietzmann's 6-year-old daughter, Fawn, helps out, too.

The three transport dogs with Mobile Mutts, a group that relies on volunteers to complete different legs of a journey, ending at a rescue shelter or other site.

Baxter said dogs and some cats are "pulled" from high-kill shelters and placed on



Fawn Kietzmann, 6, snuggles with Cinnamon, 4, a rescue dog. Susan Joy McKinney



Ellen Baxter holds her rescue dogs Abby, 9, and Truman, 12, at her home in Danville. Susan Joy McKinney

Pam Kietzmann sits with her daughter, Fawn, 6, and a black Lab named Truman (at left) and Cinnamon, 4.

rescue transports to no-kill rescues. The animals may wait there until they are adopted.

“The majority of dogs I transport go to foster homes supervised by the rescues, instead of a boarding facility,” Baxter said. Most of the dogs she transports go to rescues in northern Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota.

Mostly, she drives on Interstate-74 between Champaign-Urbana and Indianapolis; however, she also has transported along I-70 and sometimes on I-65 in Indiana.

Volunteers are needed in the Danville area, she said.

When they're not transporting, the two women foster dogs, giving the animals a chance to have a normal home life until they can find a permanent home.

Since 1991, Baxter has fostered 47 dogs and one cat. She was especially active while living in Bardstown, Ky., before moving here three and a half years ago.

The number of animals — including wildlife — that Kietzmann has rescued is in the hundreds, she said. At one point, she had six female cats with six kittens each.

“If you give them a chance, it's amazing,” she said.

A good example is Charlie, a kitten that was rescued from an abusive home. She suffered brain damage, and is mostly blind. But she can use the litter box, plays and walks (although not always in a straight line).

“You can give an animal a happy life even if they've had a terrible first year,” she added.

Kietzmann also has Cinnamon, a 4-year-old chow mix who needs a home, as well as Pumpkin, 15, a Chihuahua, and Shania, 20, a collie, and seven special-needs cats.

Baxter also has a couple of seniors, including Truman, a black Lab who's 12½ years, and Annie, a shepherd mix who's 10. Other dogs include Tracker, 8, who's mostly blind, and Abby, 9.

Seniors especially need a good home, they said.

Cinnamon and Annie, for example, both lived with a family that decided one day that the dogs were too old, and they wanted to get rid of them. Fortunately, the dogs found foster homes — one with Kietzmann and one with Baxter.

“Don't get (pets) if you don't plan on making a lifetime commitment,” Baxter said. “Don't trade your dog, cat or horse in for a new 'model.' They've bonded to you.”

**Good for kids**



Susan Joy McKinney

The two women also see the value of dogs and cats around children.

Kietzmann's daughter, Fawn, was severely autistic. But after working around the animals (in addition to other therapies), she started talking to people a couple of years ago. Pets were her bridge to communicating with people, Kietzmann said, and now Fawn loves to talk about her animals. Her autism is considered to be mild.

Baxter, who works for a child welfare agency, sees the therapeutic value of matching children with pets. "Kids from the beginning are more compassionate people if they're with animals," she said.

Fawn goes on the transports with her mother and Baxter. She's "very good with the dogs and is learning how to be compassionate and how to give back to society," Baxter said.

The two women highly recommend adopting rescue animals, either from shelters or foster homes. Such animals are highly appreciative.

If you can't take in animals as fosters or adopt them, then the women recommend volunteering. Mobile Mutts, for example, is a good way to help without getting emotionally involved with an animal, Baxter said.

What's impressive about Baxter and Kietzmann is that they don't take the easy way out; instead, they spend their time and money on animals that nobody else wants. If they had the money, they would build a sanctuary for seniors and special-needs animals.

In the meantime, they're making a difference in the Danville area, one pet at a time.

## **To help**

If you're interested in transporting animals with Mobile Mutts, e-mail: [mobilemutts@fastmail.fm](mailto:mobilemutts@fastmail.fm)

Contact Ellen Baxter at [ebaxter2010@hotmail.com](mailto:ebaxter2010@hotmail.com) or Pam Kietzmann at [kietzkittiez6@hotmail.com](mailto:kietzkittiez6@hotmail.com).

*The Pets column runs every four weeks. If you would like to have your pet featured, contact Mary Wicoff at 477-5161, send an e-mail to [mwicoff@dancomnews.com](mailto:mwicoff@dancomnews.com) or write to Commercial-News, 17 W. North, Danville, IL 61832.*

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