

Shuttle service gets Georgia shelter dogs to new homes

Volunteer drivers take some castoff canines to Northern destinations

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By [Mike Morrison](#)

Twenty-six castoff dogs left Waycross Friday bound for new homes in the North.

Moving along what has become a sort of underground railroad for canines, the animals will be relayed in many cases from driver to driver until they reach their destinations in Minnesota, New York and other points north.

Marion Stevens of Champaign, Ill.-based Mobile Mutts arranged the transport of several of the dogs. Hers and other similar groups work with animal shelters generally located in the South, where euthanasia is a common practice.

The “railroad” runs only one way, she said. “We never move dogs north to south,” she said.

The Waycross dogs came from the Okefenokee Humane Society, where shelter manager Ben Hood works overtime to save the animals left in his charge.

Hood said he is able to place 25 to 35 dogs per month in homes or with rescue organizations like Mobile Mutts. In March, he saved a record 62 from being euthanized.

But the dogs keep pouring in from Ware County and Waycross Animal Control, legitimate owner dropoffs and others that are just tossed over the fence after hours, he said.

“We can’t save them all,” he said. “We still do euthanize some.”

Some dogs come in injured or ill and must be put down, he said. Others just run out of time.

The shelter keeps the dogs a minimum of 10 days to allow time for their owners to reclaim them. If they’re adoptable, they’ll be kept around longer.

Hood’s shelter isn’t the only one moving dogs north.

McIntosh County’s Humane Animal Resource Team has been working for years with the county’s animal control facility to keep homeless dogs alive. HART

recently moved 30 “fat, helpless, homeless puppies” to New Jersey, where they were to take up temporary residence in a no-kill shelter until they find permanent homes.

Hannah Tostensen of HART said the group has relocated 258 dogs in the past two years “to areas where there is not a surplus of unwanted pets.”

Martha Lang, also a HART member, said those areas, typically up north, have comprehensive spay-neuter programs that work.

As a result, she said, “they actually have a shortage of dogs to adopt out.”

Stevens speculated that a lot of the dogs they get were bred for hunting and then were cast off when they were no longer effective.

“We get a lot of beagles and hounds,” she said.

A beagle-mix mother and eight puppies were part of a group that left Friday. Okefenokee Humane Society volunteer Lorna Brown was driving them on the first two legs of their 25-leg journey to Cordele, where another volunteer driver was to take over.

Before they reach SMART Rescue in Minnesota, 90 drivers will be involved and other dogs will be picked up in Nashville, Tenn., and Louisville, Ky., Stevens said.

Sally Geiger of Wisconsin drove her RV down to Waycross to pick up another bunch, three lab mixes and “a cute little mutt” of unknown breeding, Stevens said.

Geiger planned to drive straight through back to Wisconsin, she said.

Stevens said the people involved in these animal rescues freely give their own time and money, and often lots of it.

“Oh my gosh!” she said. “You have no idea. We do this every weekend.”

It’s a complicated, costly and time-consuming process, but there’s a better way to deal with the problem, Lang said.

“We need better spay-neuter programs,” she said.

Toward that end, HART sponsors spay-neuter programs for pets and even provides the service free to low-income pet owners, she said.

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