

By Kyle Bagenstose
Photos Courtesy of Michele Armstrong

A Voice for the Voiceless

NEARLY EVERY DAY, MICHELE ARMSTRONG IS FORCED TO MAKE CHOICES THAT MOST COULDN'T BEAR TO STOMACH. Her inbox pings, and she opens her latest e-mail to find dozens of pictures of ultimately healthy dogs, which, unfortunately, have less than 48 hours to live. Armstrong tries to remain pragmatic in her choices, picking the pups she thinks have the best chance for adoption before rescuing them from high-kill shelters.

But that doesn't make leaving the others behind any easier. "You see the fear in their faces and the loss of hope," says Armstrong, executive director of the Bucks County-based Lulu's Rescue. "Just yesterday we received a kill-list with 18 dogs, and we took seven. I can tell you the other ones did not leave the facility. And all of them we could have adopted, but you only have so many resources."

These arduous decisions have fallen to Armstrong ever since she founded Lulu's in April 2010. The organization works as an umbrella of sorts, connecting volunteers in the South, where many of the dogs are rescued, with volunteers in the Bucks County area who help find them homes. It's been a success so far with roughly 850 dogs adopted to date and a dozen or so core volunteers on board.

But rescuing is no easy task. Each dog taken from the facilities spends

a minimum of two weeks "quarantined" in a foster home, where they're observed for any signs of illnesses and taken to a vet for vaccines, de-worming and neutering or spaying. Then, a single volunteer—who Armstrong identifies only as Wanda—drives the dogs from the South to Bucks County, often being stopped at state borders along the way for hours at a time as paperwork is verified.

And even when the cumbersome process goes smoothly and another dozen dogs find loving homes, Armstrong still has to fight the feeling that she's swimming upstream. "Roughly 850 dogs, while significant, is like a tear drop in the ocean," she says. "Here, in the greater region, there are places that are taking 5,000 dogs in a month, and they're killing 95 percent of them. As many dogs as we keep pulling and pulling and pulling, there are more animals taking their place."

For that reason, Armstrong has added a second prong to her plan: education. She realizes that in order to cut down on the number of dogs killed each year, the best approach is to inform owners of one of their biggest responsibilities. "It's a very simple equation: when you don't spay and neuter your pets, they're going to procreate. It's that simple. We have the answers; we have the surgeries," Armstrong says, adding that there is an economic

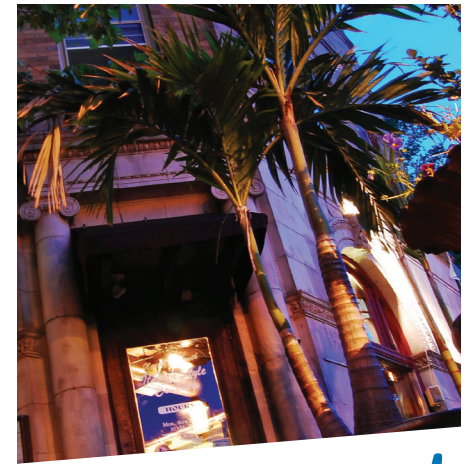


Tommy (l) and Penny's (r) meeting was love at first sight.

element at play, as well. "It costs roughly \$100 to house, feed and kill these animals. And it costs anywhere from \$15 to \$50 to spay and neuter and stop the cycle. So why are our tax dollars going to kill these animals every day?"

Taking it's-the-never-too-early-to-start approach, Armstrong uses Lulu's as a vehicle to give presentations at area schools. She is scheduled to visit the Solebury School in early November, puppies in tow, to pass along age-appropriate information. According to Armstrong, she already has about half-a-dozen pre-teens who volunteer their time almost every weekend. "It makes me super-excited, because this is the next generation," she says. "Sometimes I find that these kids are going home and educating the parents."

When asked what someone can do to help the cause, Armstrong says that step one is to be a responsible pet owner. While the southern states have the most severe dog problems, Pennsylvania, and even Bucks County, is not without its share of puppy mills. "The first thing is to definitely adopt your pet," she notes. "People say, 'I want a Boston Terrier, or I want a Chihuahua.' But the reality is that 33 percent of all purebred dogs are



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“Roughly 850 dogs is like a tear drop in the ocean. As many dogs as we keep pulling and pulling and pulling, there are more animals taking their place.”

– Michele Armstrong

pushed to facilities. So that dog that you want is there. You will find it immediately.”

For those who want to take it a step further, Armstrong says there are a number of volunteering options, ranging from donating an hour a month to help write press releases to transporting dogs to their new homes. Lulu’s also holds meet-and-greets at locations such as Pet Valu in Doylestown to show their dogs off to potential families. Those who don’t have the time to volunteer can donate money or write a letter to their congressperson promoting more animal-friendly legislation.

While it may feel like an uphill battle for Armstrong, she remains optimistic that the tide can be turned. And even for someone working on the front lines, Armstrong’s emotions can still get the best of her. Recently, after already scheduling a full transport of dogs, she received a last-minute e-mail

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Michele Armstrong with Sadie and Pippy, two of roughly 850 dogs that Lulu’s has saved since 2010.

lulusrescue.com

from a volunteer. “I’ve been doing this for a long time and I’ve seen a lot of things, but this dog just broke my heart,” Armstrong recalls. “He had a big smile on his face, tilting his head, tail wagging, and he’s giving the facility worker his paw. It was just that kind of a personality: happy-go-lucky and loving.”

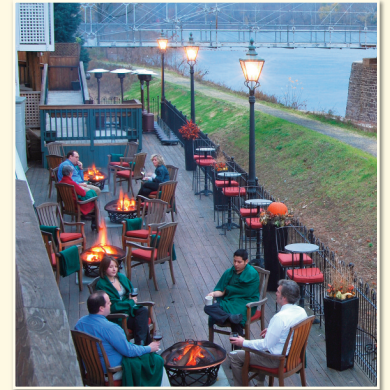
Weeks later, when Wanda set out from the South and pointed her van toward Pennsylvania, she had one extra passenger on board.

On Oct. 6, Lulu’s Rescue will be hosting their 2nd-Annual Eat,Bark,Bid fundraiser at the Carousel Lavender Farm in Mechanicsville at 5 p.m. The evening will feature dinner, an open bar, silent and live auctions and special award ceremonies.

For more information on the organization and the event, to volunteer or to donate, go online at lulusrescue.com.

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