



CONTRIBUTED

Midoma (now known as Luna) was fostered through the Friends of the Burlington County Animal Shelter, which is a finalist for World Dog Rescue honors' "Local Rescue Campaign of the Year Award." The winner will be announced on Friday during a ceremony at the World Dog Expo in Secaucus.

Barking up the right tree

Friends of the Burlington County Animal Shelter nominated for national award

By MELISSA HANEJKO
CORRESPONDENT

March Madness now has new meaning for a local animal rescue organization.

Last year, the college basketball tournament was the last thing on Jamie DePolo's mind during the third month of the year. Instead, the vice-president of the Friends of the Burlington County Animal Shelter was facing a challenge even more difficult than winning an office pool: she needed to raise \$6,000 to save a puppy's life, and she needed to do it quickly.

The resulting fundraising campaign was a slam-dunk.

In March 2016, an animal control officer picked up a severely injured small dog from a Burlington County street. The officer brought the dog, believed to have been hit by a car to Mount Laurel Animal Hospital. The officer warned the hospital staff that the dog was in bad shape, and might even need to be euthanized.

The veterinary staff prepared themselves for the worst, but they were in for a surprise when the dog arrived. The small dog was actually a puppy, no more than 6 months old, and her hind leg was basically shattered, broken in multiple places. With such a severe injury, it was possible the dog could have also sustained internal injuries.

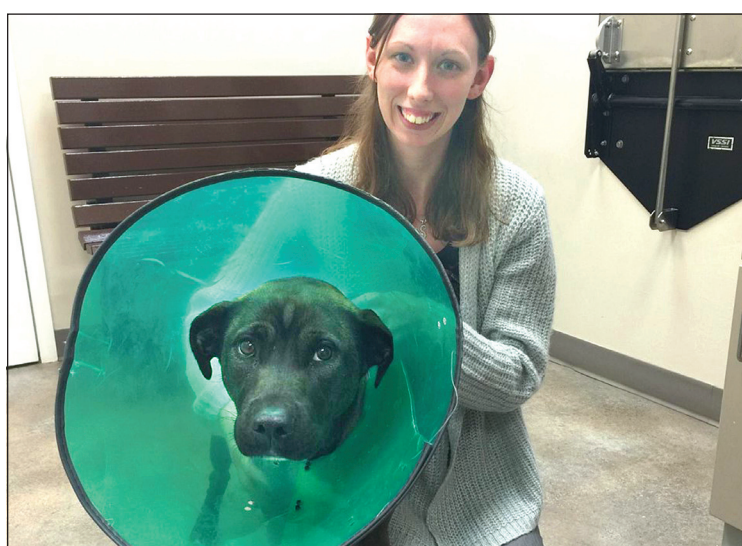
But hospital co-owner, veterinarian Dr. Christopher Torre, made the decision that they would do whatever was necessary to save the pup's leg — and life. Then came the biggest surprise: The dog, despite being in immense pain, began to wag her tail.

They would call the Lab-shepherd mix Midoma, and Jillian Erwin, rescue coordinator at MLAH, would call on the Friends of the Burlington County Animal Shelter, a registered nonprofit, for help. The two organizations have worked together frequently — MLAH provides veterinary services to the Burlington County Animal Shelter in Westampton, while the Friends' volunteers work with the animals in the shelter, and also provide foster care.

"I knew right off the bat my first phone call would be FoBCAS (after the required stray hold had passed)," said Erwin. "Without hesitation they took her aboard."

Midoma needed multiple surgeries to repair her leg, as well as pins inserted to stabilize the broken bones. The healing process would be long, requiring months of crate rest, and the cost, even after extensive discounts, would be high. FoBCAS would need to raise \$6,000, its highest fundraising goal ever.

DePolo was undeterred by the challenge. From that point, the month was officially designated as "March is Midoma Month."



The dog is seen soon after surgery at the Mount Laurel Animal Hospital.

CONTRIBUTED

Let the madness begin.

The campaign scored big points with the public, and exceeded its goal by the end of the month. As a result of the organization's extraordinary efforts, the Friends of the Burlington County Animal Shelter is a finalist for the World Dog Rescue Honors' "Local Rescue Campaign of the Year Award." The winner will be announced on Friday, during a ceremony at the World Dog Expo in Secaucus.

The World Dog Expo is an annual, three-day event that celebrates dogs, and the humans who love them. The expo features agility, diving and disk contests for dogs, a grooming competition, a trade show, and numerous activities that dogs and their owners can enjoy together. Awards will be presented to rescue groups and volunteers in eight categories at a formal dinner on Friday night.

The March is for Midoma campaign was selected from among hundreds of nominations throughout the country, based on a nomination by Erwin.

"We were surprised to hear that we were finalists for this award," said DePolo. "We're a small, local group so to be a finalist in a nationally recognized competition is really great."

While the campaign's monetary goal was large, DePolo focused on small but significant steps to raise public awareness. As there wasn't time to plan a high-ticket gala event, DePolo instead put together a grass-roots campaign, utilizing social media, word-of-mouth and persistence. "I was bordering on being obnoxious," said DePolo.

The Friends were able to match the public's donations, dollar for dollar, with money from the group's medical reserve fund. "We were able to provide \$3,000, so we just needed the public to match us," said DePolo.

Challenge accepted.

DePolo promoted the campaign

through the group's Facebook and Twitter accounts, both of which have thousands of followers, as well as email blasts and newsletters. Posters and flyers were printed and displayed anywhere and everywhere that would allow them. Volunteers even wore sandwich boards depicting Midoma's puppy-dog eyes to events.

With such a large amount of money to be raised, DePolo wanted to ensure that potential donors wouldn't feel overwhelmed. "We tried to emphasize that we weren't looking for a few people to donate hundreds of dollars each," said DePolo. "We wanted people to know that every dollar made a difference, and was appreciated."

DePolo made sure to provide frequent updates on social media, and posted an electronic ticker on the organization's web page to show the campaign's daily progress.

Lots of adorable photos of Midoma likely helped as well. "She's an adorable puppy, she's goofy and sweet, and we tried to show her personality with pictures," said DePolo.

The county rallied around Midoma, and the campaign had surpassed its goal by the end of March, allowing for the Friends to begin replenishing its medical fund. While DePolo worked nonstop on the fundraising campaign, she said the really difficult job went to the volunteer who fostered Midoma during her recovery.

"This is a high-energy puppy who needed to be on cage-rest for four to five months," said DePolo. But like DePolo, FoBCAS foster parent Gayle Skorny Hobson was up to the challenge.

"Midoma wasn't my most difficult foster," said Hobson, "But she was my most interesting." While Midoma was able to walk, she was not allowed to run, jump or climb stairs. During her time out of her crate, she needed to be kept on a leash and supervised at all times. "I work from

home, so she was able to spend most of the day with me in my office," said Hobson. "I kept her occupied with bones that took a long time to chew, puzzle toys and nose-work."

While Midoma was a nearly perfect patient, there was one aspect of her care that presented a challenge. "To get to my backyard, you need to go down a flight of stairs," said Hobson. As stairs were out of the question for Midoma, they had to get creative. "I basically taxied her to the yard," said Hobson. "I would take her out the front door, load her in my van, and drive around to the side of the yard."

Hobson did this upwards of five times a day while house-breaking Midoma. Her doggy-Uber service worked like a charm, though it did attract some attention from curious neighbors. "I think my neighbors must have thought I was crazy," she said.

As Midoma recovered, adoption applications began pouring in. A family was selected to adopt Midoma as she neared the end of her treatments. The dog's final follow-up visit to Mount Laurel Animal Hospital coincided with her adoption day. After being pronounced fully healed, Midoma was able to run into the arms of her new family.

While Midoma's foster mom wasn't able to see her finally running and playing, Hobson has received several heartwarming updates on her former patient's progress. "Bill (a FoBCAS volunteer who temporarily fostered Midoma) lives near her new home, and he has seen her a couple times on walks with her owners," she said. "She's just a normal dog now."

Allowing Midoma, now named Luna, to be a "normal dog" was the ultimate goal of Mount Laurel Animal Hospital, the Friends of the Burlington County Animal Shelter, and the donors to her campaign. But it took some extraordinary efforts to make it happen.

When the nomination form for the World Dog Rescue Honors came across Erwin's desk, she didn't hesitate. For once, Erwin, who works with more than 70 rescue groups, had an easy task. "When I saw your contest, one (group) in particular came right to mind," Erwin wrote in her nomination letter. "I couldn't do the life-saving work I do without FoBCAS by my side. Just yesterday, we saved a dog minutes away from being euthanized and now he will get the same chance Midoma got."

After all the madness of last March settled, an undisputed winner emerged: Midoma, the puppy who captured the hearts of an entire county, and perhaps soon, the nation.

To learn more about the Friends of the Burlington County Animal Shelter, visit friendsofbcas.org. Details about the World Dog Rescue Honors can be found at worlddogexpo.org/rescue-awards.