

Burlington County Times

Loss of brother sparks Medford woman's passion for animal rescue

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After losing her brother, Medford's Taryn Drayton started an animal rescue in his name, but financial troubles have caused the group to question its sustainability.

For Taryn Drayton, rescuing animals is a family affair.

The Medford resident discovered her calling as an animal rescuer and advocate through an unexpected source.

Ten years ago, Drayton's brother Joey Lloyd, a recent Shawnee High School graduate, passed away suddenly from an undiagnosed medical condition. The loss hit Drayton's father especially hard, and he decided to adopt a dog in honor of Joey, a lifelong animal lover. The next thing she knew, Drayton walked in the door to see her father and his three newly adopted puppies.

It was puppy love at first sight, and Drayton's first foray into the world of animal rescue.

"I thought I would just foster a dog or two for a shelter," said Drayton. "I didn't really plan on getting involved much more than that."

Her plan of minimum involvement soon failed, but it helped save the lives of thousands of dogs, dozens of cats, and even a pot-bellied pig over the last decade.

Drayton quickly found herself running an animal rescue, and when it came time to make it official, she knew exactly what to name the organization: Joe Joe's Place Animal Rescue, in honor of the brother who sent her down that path.

Today, the Medford nonprofit rescues dogs from shelters in South Jersey and Philadelphia, as well as rural animal control facilities in West Virginia and Kentucky. Each dog goes to a volunteer foster home, and after a quarantine period, the pups are ready to find their “forever homes.” Every dog receives veterinary care and is vaccinated and spayed or neutered prior to adoption.

Drayton’s family-oriented approach extends to the animals she saves.

Joe Joe’s Place often takes in mommy dogs with nursing puppies, litters of orphaned puppies that need to be bottle fed, and senior pets that have lost the only family they’ve ever known.

From sickness to forever homes

Diana and Elizabeth are sisters, though one might not know that at first glance. Elizabeth is more petite, white and brown spotted, with floppy ears and a tongue that is, more often than not, hanging out her mouth. Diana is rather regal-looking, with a shiny black and white coat, oversized paws, and a stocky figure. The 4-month-old mixed breeds romp and play just like other puppies, but the pair have already beaten the odds more than once in their short lives.

A few months ago, Diana and Elizabeth were nameless, motherless, and at risk of euthanasia in a rural West Virginia shelter.

They were among six puppies, who were almost 7 weeks old, that appeared to be in good health.

But soon after Drayton brought the litter home, a couple of the puppies became ill. Drayton rushed the pups to Mount Laurel Animal Hospital where she received the diagnosis she had been dreading. The pups had parvovirus, a highly contagious viral disease that most often affects dogs with weakened immune systems, those unvaccinated or young puppies.

The disease is prevented by vaccination, with puppies receiving a series of vaccines beginning at 6 to 8 weeks followed by booster shots throughout the dog’s life.

Fatal if untreated, parvo doesn’t have a cure, but can be managed with supportive and palliative care.

Drayton's puppies were immediately hospitalized at the animal hospital, where Dr. Reid Grogan, an emergency and critical care specialist, and Dr. Christopher Torre, co-owner of the practice, oversaw their care.

For Drayton, the experience was terrifying for more than one reason.

"I was really scared and devastated," said Drayton. "I didn't know what the outcome would be and I feared that the other puppies would get sick."

But all six puppies were infected, and soon after medical bills started to skyrocket.

Treatment includes round-the-clock monitoring in the critical care unit, where the pups receive intravenous fluids to prevent dehydration, regular blood work to check white blood cell counts, antibiotics to prevent infection, anti-nausea medications and feeding tubes, Torre said. Other treatments are often needed since the virus affects the intestines.

Despite the aggressive treatment, only Elizabeth and Diana survived. Both fully recovered and are now ready to find forever families.

Keeping the rescue afloat

While the pups have a bright future, Drayton isn't sure she can say the same about Joe Joe's Place.

While it likely would've been higher at another veterinary hospital, the rescue's medical bills ballooned to \$22,000. Along with the vet costs, the rescue struggles to pay its bills since it relies on donations and adoption fees.

It's crucial to keep up financially so the rescue can continue to provide food and veterinary care for its other dogs in foster care.

Along with a husky who had five puppies soon after coming to the rescue, Drayton has four other "foster failures."

"Three years ago I rescued a Husky ... The foster took her to the vet the next day, and we found out that she was pregnant," Drayton said.

"She's now my kid's guardian. She still loves me, but those two kids are hers."

Her dogs include medically fragile seniors, and others with terminal or untreatable illnesses. The rescue offers a sanctuary for dogs in hospice care and a loving family with whom they can spend their final days.

It also cares for several adoptable dogs with special needs, who are fostered by Drayton's rescue partner and co-director, Michelle Bogdanowicz.

"My sense of responsibility toward the dogs we rescue and adopt out never ends," said Drayton.

But because of financial setbacks the rescue has stopped taking in fosters.

"Before I would think, it's just one more dog, how much is one dog going to cost," said Drayton. "But after doing this for years, I know it never works out like that."

A staunch supporter of local animal rescues, Torre instituted a program to help rescues like Joe Joe's by providing discounted veterinary care, sponsoring events and fundraisers, and promoting rescues to the public. Rescues like Joe Joe's Place, which use MLAH for routine veterinary care as well as emergency services, are considered 'VIP Tier' and receive the largest discount available.

The rescue also held a fundraiser recently at the Flying W in Medford to raise need funds since the summer is when shelters are busiest.

But even with the discounted veterinary care and fundraisers, the rescue is still struggling to make a dent in its bills.

For Mount Laurel Animal Hospital rescue coordinator Jillian Erwin, losing Joe Joe's would break her heart since "they put their heart into every animal."

"I would hate to see the doors close on a rescue that's been doing great things for so long," she said. "They put their heart into every animal. They've taken owner surrenders that came into the hospital anytime I asked."

Drayton hopes she can continue in her role helping animals once the rescue is financially stable.

"We never get lucky," she said. "But this time, we're going to need all the luck in world to get through this."