

Profile of SPARE Animal Rescue

By Robyn Larson McCarthy

It all began with a bag of bright new dog collars. Back in the 1980s, LaVonne Rodstein was volunteering at the Carson Animal Shelter in the South Bay area of Greater Los Angeles. Horrified at the number of “pound seizures” she witnessed—medical researchers taking animals that did not appear to be lost pets—Rodstein brought in a bag of new collars one day and put them on the more susceptible animals. As her efforts to save them from medical experimentation worked, one bag became two, and two became many.

Also volunteering at the Carson shelter was Karen Welch, a devoted animal lover known for her willingness to run out at any hour to pick up a stray from the street. “I rescued more dogs than I can count—dozens and dozens,” she says. “But they were taking over my home and my life! I had to do something.” She and Rodstein officially joined forces, and SPARE was born.

Today, Save Pound Animals thru Rescue and Education (SPARE) is a formal nonprofit organization with a woof-worthy track record of rescuing more than 100 dogs, cats, and other abandoned animals each year. SPARE has a list of devoted supporters from the hills of Hollywood to the mountains of New England. This highly regarded organization provides the financial and volunteer support to bring abandoned and abused animals back to health and place them in loving homes.

In addition to providing for the animals’ everyday needs—bathing, spaying/neutering, microchipping, vaccinations, and general and emergency medical care—SPARE funds large projects as they arise. A major donation was made to fix up a grooming room at the Carson Animal Shelter, for example. Professional grooming facilities turn ragamuffins from the streets into attractive, happy-looking animals, giving them a much higher chance of being adopted.

“The shelter is such a drab, depressing place, they wanted to make it more appealing for visitors,” says Welch, now SPARE’s vice president. “The grooming room is adorable. Some of the dogs who come in have never had a grooming. Sometimes it’s hard to see a diamond in the rough.”

Education is also a major focus of SPARE’s efforts. Donations fund newspaper advertisements that promote spaying/neutering



Karen Welch, co-founder of SPARE, with children’s book “author” Chaucer, who donates all his royalties to his less fortunate rescue-doggy friends.

and include a coupon for such services at regional vets who’ve agreed to provide them at a discount.

The secret to SPARE’s two decades of success is twofold. The organization has never lost its highly personal touch when interacting with supporters, and Rodstein and Welch have teamed up with a diverse variety of businesses to enhance their fundraising efforts.

The group’s twice-yearly newsletter is its biggest source of donations, with each issue bringing in about \$15,000—a number that is all the more impressive when you realize the majority of donations are under \$50. “We’ve had little old ladies who slip a dollar or two in an envelope with a note that they’re sorry they can’t send more,” Welch says. “And we send a thank-you to every one of them.”

A *handwritten* thank-you note, no less. Putting pen to paper for that many notes would tax even Miss Manners. So Welch eventually asked a writer friend to provide sample thank-yous based on different aspects of SPARE’s work, from which she could pull a line or two when inspiration slowed.

The ability to inspire others to donate talents and resources in support of one’s cause is the hallmark of a good organizer. And Welch and



Actor and comedian Larry Miller, a long-time supporter of SPARE, recently adopted his second dog from the group.

Rodstein's record in doing so over the years is worthy of emulation by volunteer groups everywhere.

When actor and comedian Larry Miller adopted a dog from SPARE 15 years ago, he was "so enthralled" with their work, as Welch describes it, that he sought to boost their cause the best way he could. Hooking up Welch and Rodstein with Mike Lacey, owner of that famous nightspot The Comedy & Magic Club in Hermosa Beach, Miller served as the first headliner for what has become an annual fundraising tradition.

Having just adopted his second SPARE doggy—a King Charles spaniel mix christened Oswald Compton Miller II (Compton for the name of the city he was found wandering in)—Miller returned to the stage this past October to headline the fundraiser at The Comedy & Magic Club once again.

The popular event sells out every year, raising \$8,000–\$9,000 for SPARE. Lacey donates all ticket sales, and other businesses and well-connected friends donate everything from day spa gift certificates to collectible items like a



Chaucer the Dog greets his youngest fans at a bookstore signing to benefit SPARE in San Pedro.

basketball signed by the members of the L.A. Lakers to raffle off.

"Aren't we blessed to have people who believe in us and what we do to help the animals?" says Welch. "Larry is a caring and thoughtful man, and we're very lucky to have him as a supporter. And words can't express how grateful we are to Mike Lacey, who always goes that extra mile for SPARE over and over again!"

The extra mile, indeed: When goats and pigs find their way to SPARE's doorstep, it's been Lacey who has taken them in, welcoming them onto his property in nearby Rolling Hills Estates.

Other regular supporters of SPARE range from the Volver Hair Studio in affluent Palos Verdes, which hosts an annual cut-a-thon benefit, to Canterbury Tails Books all the way across the country in New Hampshire, which donates all royalties from the sale of their books by canine author "Chaucer the Dog" to SPARE.

Friends of the rescue animals needn't be Hollywood celebrities or successful business owners to pitch in, however. SPARE's yard sales offer a way for local supporters to provide volunteer time and material goods they do have to benefit the organization—and for Welch and Rodstein to keep up the personal connections with the bulk of their supporters.

It is those connections that continue to fuel the support for this laudable all-volunteer group. As Larry Miller blogged soon after Ozzie's homecoming, "Aren't we looking for things that tie us together in life, rich or poor? Dogs do that. They don't know whether their house is big or small, or whether their owner is wearing jewels or tattoos, they just know how to love and cuddle." ●



Before



After Professional bathing and a pretty bow can go a long way toward making once-abused dogs adoption-ready after they've been nursed back to health.



Before



After Unrecognizable as a dog in her "before" photo, Sassy's personality shines through after her professional grooming thanks to SPARE – even as she waits for her hair to grow back in.