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Lisa Parker, of Lisa Parker's Puppies, snuggles up to foster pup Mac last Wednesday afternoon in her back yard. After years spent dabbling in rez dog and puppy rescue, she began Lisa Parker's Puppies in earnest last year. Operating under the auspices of Dogster's Spay and Neuter Program (D-SNiP), Parker's organization has found homes for some 100 puppies./Photo by Jennaye Derge

Puppy love

Lisa Parker's Puppies celebrates a year of rescuing pups

by Jen Reeder

Durango native Lisa Parker has always loved dogs. In her 20s, she started picking up strays while driving through the Four Corners region and adopting them or finding them homes. Then last April, she got a text about a litter of 6-day-old puppies that was about to be euthanized on a reservation in Arizona.

Fortunately, she's a sucker for photos of cute puppies.

"Once I see a picture of them, I'm completely, 100 percent invested in their lives – finding them their forever home and saving their lives," she said.

Give the dog a bone

Two upcoming fund-raisers are planned in the near future for Lisa Parker's Puppies:

- "Puppy Shower," with a donation box for food, toys, antibiotics and other goods at the Pet Haus, 1444 Main Ave., April - May

- Charity Dog Wash with \$5 nail clippings and reduced-cost dog baths (\$15-\$25 depending on size and fluffiness), which includes bath and quick blow dry, Health hounds and Fat Cats, 21738 Hwy 160 W., 9 a.m. - 2 p.m., Sat., May 9.

Lisa found foster families for four of the pups, and she and her husband, Eric, took in two themselves. They woke up three times a night to feed them special puppy formula through droppers and help them pee by rubbing their stomachs with washcloths to simulate their mother's tongue.

"Getting six 6-day-old puppies to survive is no easy feat," Lisa said. "We got overwhelmed by the amount of bills coming in, so we started doing some fundraising and really reaching out. That's when Lisa Parker's Puppies began in earnest."

The puppies were all adopted to happy homes (three by people who had fostered them), and Lisa Parker's Puppies became a nonprofit under the auspices of Dogster's Spay and Neuter Program (D-SNiP). Lisa started a Facebook page and soon, as happens in Durango, word started to spread. Several veterinarians at AspenTree Animal Caring Center began donating

goods and services. People started volunteering to foster needy puppies, transporting homeless pups to Durango or donating money for medical expenses, such as heart surgery for a puppy named Taura. Animal behaviorist Kimberly Kincaid signed on to provide training assistance, and Parker began working with Humane Society shelters in Durango, Aztec

and Farmington to transfer puppies and dogs into or out of her group's care.

The network's hard work has paid off: by the end of 2014, Lisa Parker's Puppies had saved 60 puppies. And that number should triple in 2015, since the group has already rescued more than 40 pups this year.

"I've been really lucky," she said. "The family's building, for sure."

Lisa said often the puppies will struggle for a few days with stomach issues because they haven't been getting their mother's milk, and some have had severe – and expensive – medical issues. But she does whatever it takes to help each puppy have a chance for a new lease on life.

“Small-batch puppies – do it right, do it well,” she said.

Darcy Williamson, a veterinary technician for D-SNiP who has transported puppies with Lisa from Gallup, N.M., said dogs from Lisa Parker's Puppies make excellent pets. She said they flourish with the training, care and socialization the foster families provide at such a young age.

“That's what makes a well-rounded person and what makes a well-rounded dog: they get exposed to a lot of things,” Williamson said. “Being in a foster home, they get structure and to see what their life is going to be like, which is living with a person.”

Williamson said many dogs and cats are euthanized each year because of the number of pets that aren't spayed or neutered (D-SNiP provides \$25 sterilizations with their mobile spay/neuter clinic to combat the problem and performed 1,740 surgeries last year). She said people should consider adopting mixed-breed dogs, such as the ones available from Lisa Parker's Puppies, because of their unique genetic make-up.

“You'll never see another Henry. You'll never see another Mac,” she said, gesturing to two adorable, adoptable puppies romping together in Parker's yard. “They are about as special and unique and custom as an animal can come. They're one of a kind.”

Lisa's husband, Eric, agrees – they've adopted three of the puppies they've fostered.

“It's easy to love every dog that comes through,” he said.

The cost of adopting a dog is \$140, which helps covers costs of running the organization as well as vaccinations. Lisa does not get paid for her work, which is done on a purely volunteer basis. At times, the time commitment can rival that of a full-time job.

Though their lives have been somewhat taken over by puppies, Eric is pleased to see his wife so fulfilled.

“It's something that she has had a passion for her whole life. We've done it on a very small scale – a dog here and a dog there – but really getting this momentum is exciting, just to see Lisa kind of blossom with the passion that she has.”



Eric and Lisa Parker watch two foster

puppies, Hank, top, and Mac, below, play in their back yard last Wednesday. Since starting Lisa Parker's Puppies in 2014, the couple has adopted three of the puppies they've fostered./Photo Jennaye Derge

That momentum is necessary since there's about to be a puppy boom as female dogs come into heat with the warmer weather. In the next few months, Lisa will be flooded with phone calls about needy puppies, so she has to grow her foster-family base from the current eight homes (as well as part-time foster families) to accommodate as many dogs as possible.

“Spring is puppy season, so we’re really looking to get puppy ready. We’re always looking for fosters and are taking foster applications,” she said, adding with a grin, “And we’re always looking for forever homes. Some people call me a puppy pusher, but I say I’m a puppy matchmaker.”

Amy Pratt says it is fun to foster puppies for Parker.

“It’s work but it’s rewarding work – and it’s pretty cute,” Pratt said.

While she can grow attached to the pups in her care, many of them are adopted into the community, so she still sees them from time to time.

“And there’s always that new puppy that needs a foster home,” she said. “The way I see it is, if I keep one of the foster puppies, that’s another foster puppy that doesn’t get to have a place to stay.”

Durango resident Emily Adams has fostered dogs for Lisa Parker’s Puppies since adopting from them last December. Adams and her husband, Jason Haley, wanted to help Santa find a Christmas present for their three kids and visited Parker’s Facebook page after a recommendation from a friend. That’s how they found Cora – a “Rez Special” the Parkers had started bottle-feeding when she was just 2 weeks old.

“Cora’s our precious little pup – we adore her,” Adams said.

Adams said Lisa was incredibly supportive when Cora had a health scare – “she held my hand through every step of the way” – and even paid a veterinary bill.

“She goes above and beyond,” Adams said. “Her dedication to the puppies doesn’t end once they are adopted. She’s like their first mother, and she advocates for them so much. It’s probably the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen. I can’t speak enough about Lisa Parker and all of her puppies.”

Last summer, Janet Curry and her family adopted one of the puppies from the first litter that launched Lisa Parker’s Puppies – a lovable mutt named Sammie. Curry said Sammie is calm, sweet and sociable from having been “taken in at 3 days old and just bathed in love.”

“Lisa has changed our lives with our puppy Sammie,” Curry said. “They’re called rescue pups, but I think they rescue the people. And Lisa’s a huge part of enabling that to happen, so I have enormous gratitude for her. She feels like an extended part of our family because she gave us our beloved Sammie.”

For more information about Lisa Parker’s Puppies or to find out about fostering, visit: lisaparkerspuppies.com/index.html or www.facebook.com/lisaparkerspuppies, or email: lppdurango@gmail.com. Please send donations to: Lisa Parker’s Puppies, PO Box 4438, Durango, CO 81302.

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