

Sanctuary restoring dogs to 'wholeness' in Judsonia area

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Shalom Sanctuary owner Brandi Cunningham says her dog, Lydia, “was left 21 days and nights without food and water and was adopted out three times before we adopted her, where she found her forever home and is the smartest dog I’ve ever owned.”

Contributed photos

At-risk dogs and other animals are getting some extra attention and tender loving care at a place in the Judsonia area called Shalom Sanctuary.

The sanctuary recently had 21 dogs, “all breeds, all ages, all sizes,” according to Brandi Cunningham, who runs it.

“Shalom is a Hebrew word that means wholeness, so it’s like emotional wholeness, physical wholeness, just healing in every area so that you’re whole,” Cunningham said. “I have trained dogs since I was 9 years old and one of my passions has always been to prevent dogs from going into shelters in the first place and I always tried to find my place in that.”

Cunningham said she has operated as a trainer and has owned her own training company. At one time, she was head administrator over 13 dog companies, she said.

“One of the things that I learned as a trainer is that there are just some dogs that can’t be re-homed because there’s a lot of knowledge that needs to be had to handle certain types of aggression, illnesses and things like that.

So at the sanctuary, we actually house dogs that have behavioral issues that can't really be safe anywhere other than with a trainer," she said. "We also have dogs that come in and out for adoption purposes."

Cunningham said that she does not do "normal" rescues where a dog is brought in, spayed or neutered, vaccinated and sent it back out. She also doesn't just rescue dogs. There is a farm animal portion of the sanctuary even though the main focus is dogs.

"The whole reason that I named it Shalom Sanctuary is because I'm very patient and I'm very dedicated to each animal that comes in here, so I want to get to them in and out, all of their weaknesses, all of their strengths and then I give them a job to do," she said.

"I train every dog that comes with basic obedience and then sometimes even advanced obedience just depending on the dog, and I potty train them, crate train them, leash train them because these are the things I have seen over the years [that] gets dogs returned to the shelters."

She said problems are created by "a lack of the dog understanding what the humans want, so I train the dog but then when the dog is adopted, I also communicate with the humans to be able to communicate with their dogs. Then, I offer lifetime support of the dog while they're with their new owners so any issues that come up, I already have systems in place, answers to the questions that come up so that they don't ever have to be returned or you know it will prevent them from being sent anywhere else – which I don't allow that anyway, they would have to come back to me."

Cunningham said Shalom Sanctuary, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, has been official only for about two years even though she has always rescued and rehabbed dogs on the side and adopted them out.

Through the sanctuary, Cunningham said, they rehab dogs and then train them to be service dogs – if they qualify to do that – for veterans for free. That effort is donation-based to cover some of the training services.

"The big majority of the dogs that we have were on the euthanasia list at kill shelters," she said, adding that some of the places that they are from in addition to Arkansas include Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri and Tennessee.

"One of the favorites by popular request that we talk about often is a dog we had named Dixie. Dixie's owner actually passed away right around Dixie's first birthday and someone that knew me contacted me and I was able to bring Dixie in. And she was very large, probably around 85 pounds, very tall, but she was very difficult to control just because of her energy and her size, and we rehabbed her.

"I had her almost a year and I did full training on her, and we actually donated her to a veteran and she became a full working service dog for a disabled veteran."

She said a common theme for dogs "between shyness or aggression or behavior problems is almost always a lack of confidence. It's something I probably specialize in, building confidence in dogs who are fearful. When I'm scared, I get aggressive. I'm sure some dogs get aggressive and some dogs are very shy, so we take all the fear-based reaction and build their confidence to help those go away."

Cunningham shared the story of her dog, Lydia. "She was left 21 days and nights without food and water and was adopted out three times before we adopted her, where she found her forever home and is the smartest dog I've ever owned. People just didn't know how to handle her. She was very aggressive."

Cunningham added that she also takes older dogs "to the rescue to live out their days because otherwise they typically get euthanized." She said the sanctuary also partners "with an international ministry to raise and adopt out milking goats for people who need milk for their families."

Cunningham said more information about the sanctuary can be found at shalom-sanctuary.org, on Facebook at Shalom Sanctuary1 and also TikTok and Instagram.

“My mission statement for my life is to help people and animals live into their fullest potential, so I do counseling, I’m a pastor, I have different things that I do,” Cunningham said, “but when it comes to animals, I’m just very thankful to be able to have the knowledge and support from donors to be able to take the time to put into animals, what they really need, and make sure they find their homes where they are going to be loved forever.

“It’s an absolute abomination, the euthanasia rate for dogs that just don’t deserve it. Anytime that I’m near anything that needs fighting for, I’ll definitely do it, so it brings me a lot of fulfillment to know that these dogs were saved from whatever situation they come from and able to overcome that.”

The current needs for the sanctuary are primarily volunteers. She said she has about eight helpers at the sanctuary. “We definitely take volunteers to help with things like flyers and media,” she said. “We need people to help put up fencing and new play yards for the dogs, things like that.”

For more information, Cunningham can be contacted at (214) 480-4806 or shalom sanctuary1@gmail.com.

Source:

https://www.whitecountycitizen.com/news/sanctuary-restoring-dogs-to-wholeness-in-judsonia-area/article_c9c5794e-cadf-5f80-a6a0-83ed75846998.html?utm_medium=social&utm_source=email&utm_campaign=user-share