



THE LYME TIMES

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Sandy Springer, treasurer of Pet Connections, has helped rescue stray cats and dogs for 20 years.
Photo by Jenna Cho/The Day

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Animal welfare group marks 20 years of success.
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The First Congregational Church of Old Lyme will host a compassionate listening workshop.

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Pat Decker and her husband Pete, of Lyme, adopted Bella the dog through Pet Connections last year.

Photos by Jenna Cho/The Day



Happy Endings and Good Connections

Pet Connections still rescuing animals after 20 years

BY JENNA CHO
STAFF WRITER

Bella was found on Sterling City Road in Lyme, living under a house's porch.

The cream-colored German shepherd and Golden Retriever mix ended up next at the Lyme animal shelter, where members of Pet Connections came by to do what they do best—help animals get adopted.

Pet Connections' president Glynn McArw would come by the shelter regularly to walk Bella, and it was during one of those walks, in August, that Pete Decker first spotted Bella.

Initially, Pete and his wife, Pat, of Lyme, had no thoughts of keeping Bella; they already had a dog. But they decided

to foster her because they didn't want her to be "stuck in a pound," Pete said.

It wasn't long before the couple fell in love with Bella. While people did occasionally call to inquire about Bella, Pet Connections decided none of them was a good match for Bella.

"At some point, we would start hoping that they wouldn't find a place [for her]," Pete said. "This is where she belongs."

The Deckers' story is just one of numerous happy endings Pet Connections, now in its 20th year, has helped to tell. There's also Scoot the cat that Maggie and Jack Ostroff, of Old Lyme, adopted at 4 months old. Scoot, who also goes by the name Petunia, is now 12 and has complete reign over the Ostroffs' three Shetland sheepdogs, according to Maggie.

Pet Connections began in 1990 when McArw, its treasurer, Clinton resident Sandy Springer, and a small crew of volunteers who had all met at Valley Shore Animal Welfare League in Westbrook began rounding up feral cats behind what is now the Old Lyme post office on Halls Road.

They spayed and neutered the cats to control the feral cat population and were eventually able to place all the cats into homes, McArw said.

Pet Connections has since started rescuing stray dogs.

The group, which organized as a nonprofit in 1994, stands out among animal rescue organizations because members go out of their way to ensure a good match between animal and owner, the Deckers said.

Where other organizations typically end their relationship with a stray animal once it's adopted, Pet Connections keeps in touch with families and checks in on the animals, Pete said.

In his case, they took "total responsibility for the dog," he said.

An appreciation for felines

It's not just the five adopted cats that live with McArw that gives her love of cats away; it's also the feline-themed artwork scattered about her house in Old Lyme and the three

cat figurines that sit and sleep by the fireplace.

McArw, who is a substitute teacher, started working with the feral cat population in Old Lyme when she heard about a man who had dumped five kittens out by the post office.

"In his haste to get away, he ran over a kitten," McArw said.

The first order of business for Pet Connections is to get stray cats and dogs spayed and neutered along with a vet check-up, McArw said. If people can't afford it—or are going through a rough patch and need help with vet bills or even food—Pet Connections is there to help, McArw said.

Pet Connections can take in cats directly, but dogs must first be held at a municipal animal shelter, McArw said. That means Pet Connections works closely with area shelters, including those in Lyme, Old Lyme, East Lyme, and Old Saybrook, to try to get dogs adopted out after their required one-week holding period, McArw said.

The group operates on a budget that relies solely on donations, and unlike some other nonprofits, this one spends 100 percent of its donations on its animals, McArw said.

It's a fine balancing act. At \$90 for kittens and cats and \$200 to \$250 for dogs, the adoption fees Pet Connections charges barely cover the vet bills, said Springer.

The group places about 200 animals a year, Springer said, though it hasn't kept count of how many animals it has helped in its 20 years.

"I think we've made a difference," McArw said.

The group is always in need of donations—its main fundraising ambition is to build a shelter—and people willing to foster animals. McArw can only take in so many.

"Five is more than enough," she said.



Maggie and Jeff Ostroff, of Old Lyme, adopted Scoot (above) from Pet Connections 12 years ago.



To make a donation, mail checks to Pet Connections, Inc. at P.O. Box 1033, Old Lyme, CT, 06371. For more information, visit www.petconnectionsoldlyme.org.