

'They don't know they're different:' Galion man's nonprofit provides wheelchairs for dogs

Gere Goble, Bucyrus Telegraph-Forum Published 9:11 p.m. ET March 20, 2019 | Updated 9:13 p.m. ET March 20, 2019

BUCYRUS - When you hear John Lizotte talk about Rescued Rollers, the nonprofit he operates from his Galion home, you can pretty much guess it all started with one special dog.

"His name was Ranger," Lizotte confirmed. "He needed a wheelchair."

The border collie came from Texas, where his original owners were unable to deal with his special needs. Lizotte adopted the dog and started trying to figure out what to do.

"Everything I learned from him was a huge learning curve," Lizotte said.

He decided to put his newfound knowledge to good use. Through Rescued Rollers, Lizotte collects, reconditions and distributes used wheelchairs for dogs.

"What I do, is for dogs that need wheelchairs, like in a rescue or a shelter, and even if your dog needs a wheelchair, I supply cheap or free wheelchairs, so these dogs can get whole," he said.

People donate chairs they no longer need. It costs Rescued Rollers about \$70 to clean, sanitize, refurbish, pack and ship a donated wheelchair, he said. In comparison, a new chair can cost hundreds of dollars.

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Chairs are provided as a lifetime loan — when the dog no longer needs the chair, it must be returned to Rescued Rollers. Lizotte then passes it along to another dog. He has helped animals all across the nation.

But that's just part of his mission: Lizotte also seeks to educate people about how to care for a dog with a disability — whether it's blind, deaf, incontinent or unable to walk properly.

He speaks to as many groups as possible, including area Kiwanis clubs, church groups, educational events and other gatherings.

"A lot of vets, sadly, don't realize that these guys in a wheelchair, or blind and deaf, can have good quality of life," he said. "So their first response — and it's true even today with many of the people that I work with — their first response is, 'Put the dog down, it cannot have a quality of life.'"

"That's a big reason I do this: There's options."

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Lizotte spoke to a group at the Crawford County Council on Aging, 200 S. Spring St., on Friday, accompanied by his dog Laura, who can't use her rear legs properly because of a problem with her spine.

"Laura was almost put down in the Bahamas, because they didn't think she'd have a quality of life," Lizotte told the crowd. "Well, you see how good she does."

Laura was rescued from the Bahamas and sent to New York City for treatment. The rescue group that arranged for her care there contacted Rescued Rollers for a wheelchair. Lizotte stayed in touch with her rescuers as she went through two or three months of treatment, as he always does after sending a wheelchair.

"Nobody stepped up to adopt her," he said, so in August, he drove 10 hours and brought her home.

Laura uses a wheelchair due to a problem with her spine, but had this joyful flash of the smile during a Rescued Rollers

Friday was Laura's debut at a presentation, and Lizotte admitted she did even better than he expected, sitting quietly through most of his talk, then working her way around the room in her wheelchair, greeting each audience member with a friendly nuzzle.

presentation at the Crawford County Council on Aging on Friday (Photo: Gere Goble/Telegraph-Forum)

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Laura, who can't use her rear legs properly due to a problem with her spine, greets Emily Stoney during a Rescued Rollers presentation Friday at the Crawford County Council on Aging, 200 S. Spring St. (Photo: Gere Goble/Telegraph-Forum)

"I'm on Cloud Nine with her," he said after the speech.

Rescued Rollers is Lizotte's full-time occupation. He stressed that every penny donated goes into providing help for disabled dogs.

She said. "You can see how Laura was here: She doesn't say 'I'm crippled.' She just goes."

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Learn more

For more information about Rescued Rollers Wheelchairs for dogs, visit rescuedrollers.com, check out the Facebook page at facebook.com/RescuedRollers or call 419-631-3927 and leave a message.

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