

SPOTLIGHT ON RESCUE



by: Carol Allen, Chair
 National Rescue Committee
 (315) 469-7926
 E-mail: carosal@twcny.rr.com

The chickens in Reinholds, Pennsylvania (human population 4655) are still sleeping when the cacophony of barking Golden Retrievers starts at sunrise. The kennel guests are wide-awake as Kennel Manager and Trainer Ken Kline begins the 20-step walk from home to a hungry gaggle of Golden Retrievers.

Morning begins with “turn-out”—stretches, yawns, a couple of short gallops and a brisk rubdown from Ken. One by one, they bound back into the kennel, on high alert for the morning’s meal. The barking and tail wagging doesn’t stop as Ken wheels the meal cart down the aisle, placing each Golden’s meal in the bowls. Then it’s fresh water, time for digestion, and the day’s work begins.

Depending on the kennel population, anywhere from one to six vol-

unteers arrive to help with the day’s routine.

Now the sun’s up, the indoor/outdoor runs are opened, and the dogs watch—some patiently, some barking—as each Golden is brought out for exercise and training. After a warm-up in the training area, it’s over to Keaton and Kelly’s Korral, a two-acre fenced yard with some agility and utility equipment to keep the dogs interested (even if it’s only used to mark!). Regardless of rain, snow or blazing sun, the dogs are never shortchanged on their exercise or training, even if it has to be before sun-up or moved indoors to one of three common areas.

After each Golden has been exercised, training or reinforcement of basic commands begins. By 1 p.m., it’s nap time. Ken may perform some minor

repairs or leave for the half-minute walk back to the house.

At 4 p.m., the night shift duplicates the routine. A few sit/stays are the only items on the night’s training agenda. Nighttime is playtime. By 9 p.m., tired Golden Retrievers are ready for the humans to leave, but not without one last ritual. As the caretaker or staff readies guests for bedtime, they check

the list to see which Golden receives which good-night treat. Options are a hard rubber Kong toy stuffed with a bit of peanut butter or a rice cake spread with peanut butter.

It’s been another good day for the Golden Retrievers at Delaware Valley Golden Retriever Rescue (DVGRR). When the lights go out, every Golden is ready for sleep. Even the Golden Retrievers who have just entered the program catch on quickly. DVGRR co-founder Robin Adams says, “We know they communicate to each other!”

DVGRR, founded in 1993 by Adams and Kathy Uhrman, is a volunteer-operated, nonprofit organization dedicated to finding new homes for displaced Golden Retrievers. Adams served on the Committee to Assist Rescue for GRCA from 1991 to 1998, wrote the Golden Lifesaver Column in the *GRNews*, and was the primary author of *Starting a Rescue Organization* (donated to the GRCA in 1996 and printed in 1997).

Kathy Uhrman, breeder of the Golden Retriever who once guarded the Statue of Liberty, was also founder of Pine Barrens GRC and active in New Jersey rescue. When she and Adams met in the early ’70s, they performed rescue together and organized the beginnings of DVGRR.

Since its incorporation in 1993, the group has helped more than 1,400 Golden Retrievers find new homes. DVGRR has also produced the video *Grooming Your Golden*, which is, to



Dewey’s Drool Room, also known as the kitchen. Ken Kline, live-in caretaker and “Bauer.”



Rainbow Bridge Memorial Garden.

date, the only video available on the subject.

In 2000, however, despite a list of almost 200 volunteers and 30 foster homes, the group was frustrated by its inability to respond to more than a dozen Golden Retrievers in need at any one time, either because no foster homes were available or the needs were greater than the foster homes could manage.

At the 2000 Annual Rescue Reunion, plans for a building fund were announced, and the first dollar went into the jar. At the end of the reunion, DVGRR Board Member Patrick Emmett was given a real estate book, which just happened to feature a local kennel for sale. An appointment was made to tour the facility; one week later the building plans were shelved and plans for acquiring the kennel were put into high gear instead.

Millstone Kennel, built in 1994, had been operated as a training and boarding facility until the first owner sold it and moved to Florida. The new owners, new to kennel management, found themselves caring for up to 70 dogs, all in indoor runs, and facing a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day a week career. Within a year, the facility was placed on the market.

Purchasing Millstone would be a huge undertaking for DVGRR. To learn more, several board members traveled to Massachusetts to visit the kennel operated by Yankee Golden Retriever Rescue. There they discussed feasibility and showed the Yankee group a video of the potentially available facility. After participating in the day-long meeting, Yankee co-founder Joan Puglia's depart-

ing words to the group were, "Go for it!"

The seven-member board of directors met to make a decision. It was to be unanimous or nothing. By unanimous decision, they decided to move forward.

Pat Emmett agreed to chair the capital campaign, with Robin Adams' husband Jim Adams as co-chair. DVGRR President Mary

Plummer was in charge of day-to-day operations, while Robin Adams started work on developing kennel policies, procedures and staffing.

A daunting goal lay before them. The group needed to raise \$425,000 in less than 90 days.

Former Philadelphia Mayor Ed Rendell (Governor Elect of Pennsylvania) and family had adopted "Mandy," a severely neglected Golden, in 1997. They were enthusiastic supporters of the program. When asked if he and Mandy would serve as Honorary Chair and Chair Dog, his response was an instant, "Yes!"

At a kick-off event attended by more than 150 friends of DVGRR, a video of our visit to Yankee GRR was shown, and the success of this much-respected organization was highlighted. A video tour of Millstone Kennel was presented, and a question-and-answer period covered many thought-provoking questions. At the conclusion of the event, approximately \$10,000, with additional pledges, had been raised.

As the deadline drew closer, a loan was secured and DVGRR took out a mortgage for the balance of approximately \$130,000 needed to acquire the kennel. Settlement was scheduled for Friday, September 15, 2000.

The very next

morning, volunteers descended on the newly dubbed "Golden Gateway," scrubbing and sanitizing kennels from top to bottom. By Monday, September 18, the caretaker had moved into the home on the premises and the first Golden Retriever, "Joey," had arrived. DVGRR hit the ground, paws running.

Early Days at Gateway

In the beginning, the group relied heavily on help and advice willingly provided by Yankee Golden Retriever Rescue. Through almost daily e-mails, Yankee co-founder Joan Puglia helped DVGRR through the first six months of operation. Each frantic e-mail to Yankee was returned with a "Don't worry; all the break-in pains are almost over." There were days that Joan would predict the next event! She was right, as usual.

Much had to be done to take Golden Gateway from a boarding kennel to an operating rescue and rehabilitation facility. The two-acre exercise area was completely fenced to provide room for the dogs to run and play. Volunteers constructed 10 indoor/outdoor-roofed runs with guillotine doors. A section of the kennel area was designated as an "isolation" area for sick or recovering Golden Retrievers and those arriving from shelters.

In isolation, a separate air system, bathing facilities, freezer and cooking area all allow the Golden Retrievers to be cared for without fear of cross-contamination to the general population dogs. A separate exercise area was also fenced in to meet the exercise needs of the Golden Retrievers in isolation.



A closeup look at "Scooter" in the grooming room tub getting a bath.

A Stay at Gateway

After a Golden has been pre-screened and accepted into the program by a member of DVGRR's intake team, an appointment is scheduled for the relinquishing owner to bring the dog to Golden Gateway. If necessary, volunteers assist with transportation of the Golden to the facility.

The first three days after arrival, no demands are placed on the Golden so he or she can acclimate slowly. By the third day, evaluation starts, which includes completion of a five-page "report card" by the caretaker or caretaker's assistant.

The report card evaluates everything from the number of times the Golden likes to "potty" to crate training experience and car behavior. The relinquishing owner is also required to complete an "Intake Profile," which is compared to the Golden's report card. Often, the two don't match.

The dogs stay at Golden Gateway for a minimum of two weeks before adoption plans are initiated. The typical stay averages about a month, but many Golden Retrievers have spent several months at the facility.

The Blind Leading the Blind

A shelter called President Plummer to complain that "rescue walked in, turned their back, and walked out" on two blind Golden Retrievers. After confirming that it was not DVGRR, transport volunteers quickly picked up this father and son duo dumped by a breeder who'd told the shelter, "They lived outside."

Even in rescue, it's rare to find a Golden who has not had at least *some* exposure to humans. "Dakota" (the father) and "Porky" (renamed "Corky") knew nothing. They had no vocabulary, little familiarity with humans, and weren't house- or crate-trained. Since they had lived in an outdoor kennel, whenever they wanted to "go," they did.

Days quickly turned into months. "They taught us, and we taught them," says Robin. "They led us by teaching us to keep things simple, and we, in turn, led them to the first real lives they'd known." One day, caretaker Ken's wife, Sandy, was found on all fours on the outside of the guillotine door, trying to



Lori Stick, one of the volunteers and "Sandy" taking a break in front of Golden Gateway.

teach Corky how to go in and out. Corky and Dakota soon learned to "stop" when they were about to walk into something, "go out" when it was time to potty, and "sit" before dinner was served.

Adopted separately, Dakota and Corky have become neighborhood celebrities and are both deeply cherished by their newfound families.

Rescue Helping Rescue

Once word of DVGRR's acquisition of Golden Gateway reached other rescue groups, many asked DVGRR to discuss the feasibility and realities of *their* acquiring a permanent facility as well.

RAGOM (Rescue a Golden of Minnesota) founder Jane Nygaard and Bonnie Giacomini spent three days at Golden Gateway learning the ropes and realities. At the conclusion of the weekend, Jane was asked to comment on her most significant observation. She responded, "The Golden Retrievers are so happy."

DVGRR now serves as a resource to other groups who are considering either buying or building their own facilities. We have met with representatives from Norcal Golden Retriever Rescue, Mid-Florida Golden Retriever Rescue, and even Greyhound Friends for Life out of California. By consulting with these groups before they open their doors, we hope to help them avoid some of the mistakes and pitfalls.

Why the Trend Toward Permanent Facilities?

"If we had a dollar for each time we heard, 'He's not like the Golden we had when I was a kid,' our mortgage bal-

ance would be paid," remarks Adams. "For the most part, they're right. But people also don't take into consideration that families today are not what they were 40 years ago. Mom stayed home and raised the kids and trained the dog. Today's families don't have the same time. When they purchase a puppy, their expectation is that they're getting the dog they had as a child."

That, plus an increase in genetic problems, have made rescue groups busier than ever. The foster home was the ideal situation for many years. After housing a difficult Golden,

however, many foster homes declined to volunteer again. In one month, DVGRR "lost" 12 Golden Retrievers because they had no foster homes and nowhere to go with them. A place and a system were needed to cope with the, "Get the dog now or I'll shoot it" situations, the sick or terminally ill dogs who still have quality of life, and the poorly trained, poorly socialized Golden Retrievers.

DVGRR points out that embarking on the road to a permanent kennel facility is certainly not an extravagance. Who in their right mind would voluntarily commit their rescue group to a mortgage, payroll, employee issues and extensive volunteer management? "It becomes a situation where you either rise to the challenges," says Adams, "or you come to terms with the fact that you're going to start losing more and more Golden Retrievers."

Adams notes that in many ways the work has become a little easier. Routine, routine, routine is the key. All volunteers receive a "Golden Gateway Volunteer Manual" that outlines expectations and requirements for the volunteers' safety and the Golden Retrievers' comfort.

It hasn't met everyone's expectations. Once the volunteers have undergone extensive training by working side-by-side with the paid staff for several months, they are permitted kennel access. There are currently about 10 "volunteer staff" who assist our paid staff. Our regular volunteers, for instance, are not allowed in the kennel—that's the dogs' space.

Golden Gateway also has its own language for commands (routine, routine, routine), and each volunteer is instructed to use that language when

working with the Golden.

Bringing Golden into the "human" side of Gateway several times a day simulates "home time." Volunteers bring a book or personal paperwork and sit on the sofa or a chair, allowing each Golden to interact in a home setting. The volunteers learn (and document) whether the dog likes to climb on furniture, nudges with its paw for attention or lies quietly by the volunteer's feet.

The Golden are also tested in the kitchen to see if they'll "counter surf," attempt to steal food or raid the trash cans.

A few senior citizens like to stop by and play with the dogs. "That's wonderful for us," says Adams, "because it gives staff the opportunity to spend more time with some of our tougher cases while the easy-going ones can spend time with our human guests. Everyone wins."

The day after DVGRR moved into Gateway, one of the volunteers, who also volunteers for the county Animal Rescue League, arrived with a cat. Named "Einstein" ("He was our experiment," laughs Adams), this fearless feline loves the dogs but has a cat door and a room of his own for when he wants to (and in some cases needs to) get away from the dogs. It's not uncommon to find Einstein curled up tightly against one of the dogs. If he finds a special "buddy," staff sometimes can't close the crate door because Einstein wants to be right in the crate with the Golden.

One of Einstein's very special friends was "Nutmeg," a stray with no tail, very little fur, and numerous uterine tumors. She stayed at Gateway for several months and when she moved into foster care, Einstein was depressed for weeks. When "Nuttie" came back to visit, they'd run to see each other like two long-lost loves.

A New Set of Challenges

It's not Nirvana by any stretch of the imagination. Suddenly you have to worry about things that didn't exist before. Fund-raising suddenly goes from a casual activity to an absolute necessity.

Any organization dependent on donations and fund-raising for its sole support lives with the fear of failure on a daily basis. After September 11, DVGRR, like many other non-profits,

FROM A GARAGE TO THE GOVERNOR'S MANSION. CAN A DOG'S LIFE GET ANY SWEETER?

While there have been many canines in Governors' mansions and the White House, few have a Cinderella story like this one.

Mandy, a Golden Retriever rescued by DVGRR, lived in a garage most of her life. "When she arrived in our program, the smell of gasoline was overwhelming," states Robin Adams. "In addition, she was poorly socialized, which meant that her adoption prospects would be greatly reduced."

A few weeks earlier, Mayor Edward C. Rendell's beloved Golden Retriever, "Woofy" died, and the family was devastated. "When I spoke to the Mayor, he often referred to Mrs. Rendell wanting another dog, but you could definitely hear the sadness in his voice. Woofy often sat under Mayor Rendell's feet on long nights in his office.

"We told him about Mandy, sure that she would be rejected because of her distrust of people, but surprisingly, he said 'yes' without even meeting her!"

Today Mandy is as outgoing as Mr. Rendell himself. Instead of soaking up gasoline, she's soaking up attention and attending social events as though they've been planned for her.

"In 2000 at our annual Rescue Reunion, Mr. Rendell advised us that he wanted to adopt another Golden. However, Mrs. Rendell put her foot down (softly) because their life was so hectic that they weren't sure they could provide the attention a new addition would deserve," states Adams. "Throughout the year, whenever we communicated with Mr. Rendell, he always told us he wanted another dog, but 'Midge says not now.'

"Immediately after the election, Mrs. Rendell called to tell us that their application, on hold for more than a year, could be re-activated." During the months that followed, we had more than 30 Golden Retrievers in our facility, Golden Gateway. Yet, none was a good match for the family. Then along came a young female who had much the same background as Mandy. Poorly socialized, yet longing for attention, we asked Mrs. Rendell if they'd consider another "tough case." Her "absolutely" reply was immediate, so we set up an appointment to bring Mandy to Golden Gateway to see if the two dogs were compatible.

While a Golden is in our care at Golden Gateway, they're showered with love and attention from our caretaker and trainer, Ken Kline, and the many volunteers who help at Golden Gateway. Yet when a prospective adopter enters the room it's like the dogs *know*, and they completely forget about us! This was the case when Mrs. Rendell walked into the room. "Ginger" ran to her!

We introduced Ginger to Mrs. Rendell, who immediately got on the floor to hug and kiss Ginger. "We had a chuckle. Here's the First Lady on the floor, surrounded by tumbleweeds of Golden fur, getting wet kisses all over her face and loving every minute of it. When we carefully introduced Mandy and Ginger, it was as though we had found two long-lost sisters," states Adams.

They ran, played, nipped at each other's legs to make each other tumble and raced around Keaton and Kelly's Korral, our two-acre fenced exercise and training area.

"We had to give a time-out because we were afraid they were both overdoing it! We knew the match would be a success, but we wouldn't release Ginger until Ken did Ginger's training on the Gentle-Leader, the collar system we use on all our Golden who pass through Gateway. This will help the Rendells when taking the two dogs on a walk. We've often seen Mr. Rendell being pulled behind Mandy. It's quite a sight.

"What's gratifying to us is that the Rendells could literally have any dog or Golden Retriever in the world, yet they chose a rescue dog. It sets a wonderful example for people to see that a shelter dog makes a great companion! He may be Philadelphia's former mayor and our governor, but when it comes to his dogs, he's just a regular guy with a big, Golden heart."

Mandy and Ginger will be moving into the Governor's Mansion in January, and both will accompany the governor during his daily duties.

Years ago, Mr. Rendell was described as "a man of the people," but he sure is a second-hand dog's best friend, too.

saw financial support decrease or stop.

"We make no money on the dogs," says Adams. "In 2001, for instance, our average cost per dog was \$327, with an adoption fee of \$300. We price-shopped for veterinary services and were happy to learn that our existing provider was still the most reasonable, as we have been extremely satisfied with the care given to our Golden Retrievers over the past 10 years. Since our veterinary team has been involved with almost all of our 1,400 adopted Golden Retrievers, they're very much in tune with the problems associated with the breed."

The need for specialized diagnostic work has also increased. With the ability to properly provide postoperative care and rehabilitation, DVGRR has increased orthopedic services for elbows and hips. After hip surgery, a Golden Retriever can be expected to stay at Gateway for at least two months during the recuperative and rehabilitation process. Adoption prospects are better once the surgery has been completed, successful rehabilitation is completed, and the dog's hair has grown back.

Volunteers Making the Difference

Without our dedicated core of volunteers who work hard and tirelessly, we'd be lost, states Plummer. The volunteer team, led by Sandy Clouser and Gail Eyer, recruits, educates and trains each volunteer who may have interaction with the dogs.

"Our kennel rules are stringent," explains Plummer, "not only for the safety and comfort of our dogs, but for the humans as well." Those permitted kennel access have undergone additional training in "dog speak" and human safety. The kennel staff must wear ear and eye protection, gloves and rubber-sole shoes.

The isolation facility is segregated by a wall and different air supply, and everything we have on the general population side of Golden Gateway is duplicated in isolation. That means a second refrigerator, microwave, bathing area, towels, bowls and other operational supplies. A foot bath is used when we enter and exit through one door, and we can't get back into the building without walking outside first. The Golden Retrievers in isolation have two sep-

arate exercise areas, and as long as their health allows, they receive the same activity as the general population.

The Pot of Gold

Settlement day at Golden Gateway proved a mixed bag of emotions for the dedicated members of DVGRR. Co-founder Kathy Uhrman died in 2000, so she never got to share the dream. However, our volunteers built a Rainbow Bridge Memorial Garden and have placed a bench honoring Kathy "over" the bridge. They saw Golden Gateway as their pot of gold at the end of a rainbow, but knew there was still a long, long road ahead.

"On settlement day, about 6 p.m.," remember Adams, "we were standing at the entrance to Golden Gateway, toasting our supporters and still in shock at the responsibility that lay before us." Suddenly, Pat Emmett, Campaign Chair, said, "Look!" There in the sky, directly in front of them, was a perfect rainbow.

"It was the sign we were waiting for," concludes Adams. "Not one of us had dry eyes. And with that, we turned around, and got to work." ❖