



best friends rescue

# Vick

*Ellen gets one of her first snuggle sessions ever with Best Friends rehabilitator Ann Allums. Photos by Molly Wald.*



Good news for the former residents of Bad Newz Kennels

# tory Dogs

Here at Best Friends, we call them the “Vicktory” dogs – 22 pit bulls seized from ex-NFL star Michael Vick and placed in special care at Best Friends Animal Sanctuary.

Our veterinarians describe them as suffering from post-traumatic stress, very similar to soldiers returning from a war zone or other people who have experienced extreme trauma and abuse. Many of them had been forced to fight to the death – like gladiators in some primitive arena.

Indeed, some of the nation’s other animal protection organizations were simply calling for the dogs to be killed.

But killing is never an option at Best Friends, except when painful, terminal disease makes it the right option – the kind option – for a particular animal.

And what kind of message does killing out of convenience send about how our society treats the victims of such horrible abuse?

Already, here at the sanctuary, the Vicktory dogs are making progress: learning how to play, how to relax, how to love. Many of them will be adopted to experienced homes. Others will live out their lives in the beautiful natural environment of Best Friends Animal Sanctuary.

As the Vicktory dogs begin their healing at Best Friends, Paul Berry, executive director of Best Friends,

describes how and why Best Friends stepped into this situation; veterinarian Dr. Frank McMillan talks about the emotional and mental healing of animals who’ve experienced severe trauma; and staff writer Sandy Miller writes about the knee-jerk reaction of cities that are imposing bans on certain breeds of dogs.

First, Paul Berry explains why Best Friends offered to take them in and what lies ahead for them.

## **Their arrival at the sanctuary**

They were a bit weary from the trip, but lots of tails wagging. And for us, it was a mix of emotions, seeing their big smiling eyes against the scars on their faces from all the fighting. Most of all, we were just glad they were here and safe.

## **Why pit bulls have become the dogs of choice for dog fighters**

Ironically – tragically – it’s their trusting and loyal nature that makes pit bulls so susceptible to exploitation by people. Pit bulls are very eager to please, and the people who want to fight these dogs breed and train them to be friendly to people and aggressive to other dogs.

The training techniques are very oppressive and extremely cruel. And most folks don’t realize that the vast majority of dogs bred for fighting don’t actually make the cut. The ones who refuse to fight are either killed or become bait dogs, or they’re just abandoned to the streets and end up in already overcrowded shelters. In fact, more bully breed dogs are killed in shelters than any other breed.

## **What Best Friends is doing to combat the horrible blood sport of dog fighting**

We need better enforcement of anti-dog-fighting laws in our country, and most existing laws need to be strengthened. We’re very pleased that Best Friends’ legislation is currently making its way through the Georgia state senate, where it can serve as a model for other states.

But dog fighting is a cultural problem of epidemic proportions. It’s now a billion-dollar industry, and it’s firmly rooted in at-risk communities in every major city in the U.S. So we’ll need more than just legislation to effect real change. Over the past year, Best Friends has been developing model programming that works with churches and civic groups in at-risk communities on the intrinsic relationship of domestic and youth violence – and their relationship to dog fighting in these communities. The results are very good and we intend to expand that programming into more cities this year.

## **Why Best Friends took 22 dogs from the Michael Vick case when it turns down requests to take pit bulls every day**

There was a lot of talk from other organizations about killing the dogs. That seemed entirely wrong to us. These dogs were the ultimate victims of a horrible crime that had become a national outrage. We could not possibly go along with the idea that they would simply be held as evidence until the court proceedings were over, and then be summarily killed.

What kind of message does that send to local humane groups and rescue organizations all over the country who are doing all they can to save the lives of thousands of other dogs in similar circumstances?

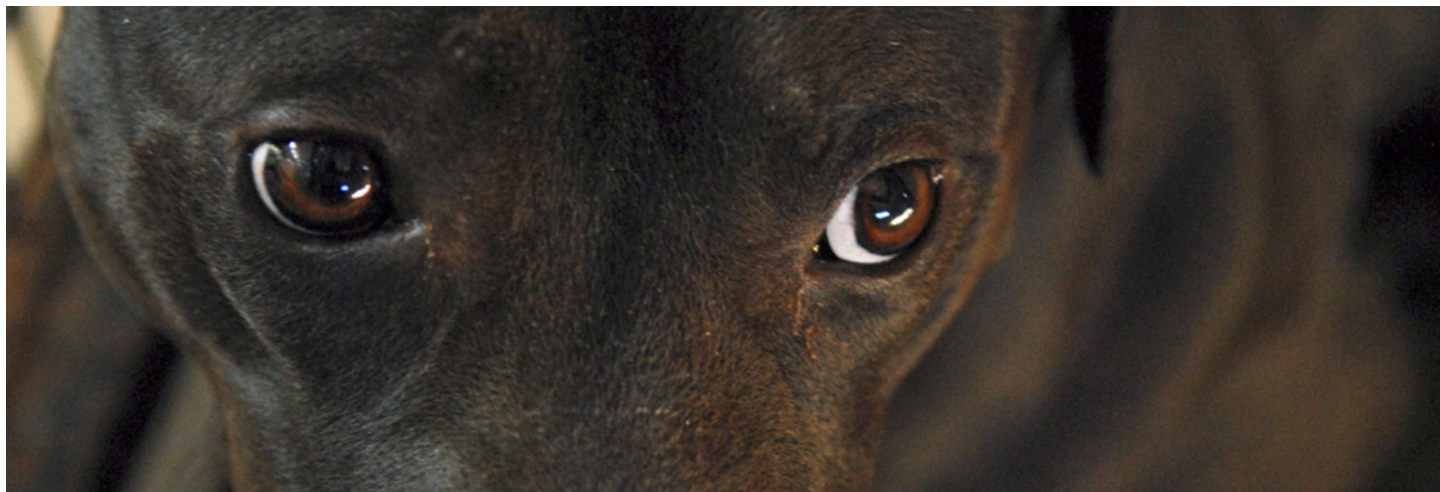
We needed to make it absolutely clear that there are real options, real alternatives, for the victims of these terrible crimes.

### On the future of the dogs

They'll all have very good lives, either here at the sanctuary or in new forever homes.

And yes, that means we're keeping the door open that some can be adopted. We've worked with bully breeds and dog-aggressive dogs for many years. We've been successful in rehabilitating many dogs who have been as severely abused as these have. So we're quite confident that by recovering their trust

and teaching them life skills, many can be adoptable, given the right home environment. We'll take each one on a case-by-case basis, but our trainers are already making breakthroughs in just the few weeks the dogs have been here. It's really amazing to watch them working together.



## Healing the Victory Dogs

Frank McMillan, DVM, specializes in the mental health and emotional well-being of animals, especially those who have suffered psychological trauma. Prior to joining the medical team at Best Friends Animal Sanctuary, Dr. Frank was a clinical professor of medicine at the College of Veterinary Medicine at Western University of Health Sciences. He has published dozens of papers in scientific journals and is the author of *Mental Health and Well-Being in Animals*, a textbook used in countries all over the world, and the popular *Unlocking the Animal Mind*.

In this interview, he talks with *Best Friends* editor Michael Mountain about the diagnosis and treatment of the Victory dogs and what this work may mean for animals coming out of traumatic abuse.

*Best Friends:* You've explained that you're looking at the similarities between what these dogs have suffered and what you see in soldiers and other people with post-traumatic stress disorder.

**Dr. Frank:** Yes, we're looking at what happens psychologically when animals go through adversity of any great magnitude

— puppy mills, hoarding or, in this case, dog fighting. It's not really known what goes on psychologically because nobody's ever looked at it. People have simply taken dogs one by one and tried to re-socialize them. It's had a fair success rate but we may be able to do a lot more once we understand the psychological impact of trauma.

*Best Friends:* How do you begin?

**Dr. Frank:** Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) occurs in about 20 percent of people who go through this kind of trauma, whether as a result of war or violent crime against

### Victory Dogs Timeline

#### April 25, 2007

Investigators searching football star Michael Vick's property find evidence of dog fighting, including treadmills, scales, a "rape stand" for breeding, and a pry bar used to force open a dog's jaws.

Officers remove 66 dogs — 55 of them pit bulls.

#### July 17, 2007

Vick and others are indicted by a federal grand jury for "conspiracy to travel in interstate commerce in aid of unlawful activities and to sponsor a dog in an animal fighting venture."

In the days that follow, Best Friends and other humane organizations visit NFL offices in New York, urging the league to suspend Vick.

#### August 20, 2007

Attorneys announce Michael Vick will plead guilty.

Two of the largest national humane organizations call publicly for the dogs to be killed.





them, or another cause. So number one is to establish how many animals who go through situations of great adversity suffer psychological trauma with emotional scars that last. How deep do those scars go? How long do they last? And what's the best way to reverse them?

In people, all kinds of techniques have been developed, some more successful than others, most likely depending on the causes. But with dogs, there has been just one approach: If you have a traumatized dog, you treat him like any other fearful dog. That's about as sensible as taking somebody who's got PTSD and saying we don't really care what caused this, we're just going to get you through it.

**Best Friends:** What do we know about PTSD in people that we might be able to apply, in this case, to the dogs?

**Dr. Frank:** We know that PTSD does occur in animals. We don't know how many are affected, how badly, and what can we do to reverse it. So in treating the Vicktory dogs, we have an opportunity to do a real study on which of the animals are most affected, what the damage is, and whether it sends them into a depressive state, an aggressive state or a fearful state. We'll then work with dogs individually with the known cause behind us.



*At first, many of the dogs were terrified of humans. For days, Shadow cowered in the back of his play area. He didn't want anyone to come close. The sight of a leash made him wince, as though he thought he was about to be punished. To counteract this fear, caregivers started putting the leash on the ground so he could sniff it and see that it was harmless. Then, they hooked the leash to his collar and let him drag it around. Then he learned to "go on walks" right in his own little room. And slowly, with lots of petting and treats, he learned to take real walks on lead. Now, when he sees a leash, he gets happy and wants to go, go, go!*

**Best Friends:** Do we have any examples yet that clearly characterize what you're looking for?

**Dr. Frank:** Yes. We're seeing every reaction that we see in people after these kinds of traumas, when the overriding emotion is fear. We have dogs who are just

a little ambivalent about people. Some stay halfway in their run – they approach, retreat, approach, retreat. They want to get near you but they're too scared of humans. And then, of course, we have the sad ones who cower in the back of their runs and tremble when you approach them.

At first, we weren't seeing aggression.

#### August 24, 2007

Vick admits to conspiracy, helping to kill several dogs and bankrolling the fights but not betting on them.

NFL commissioner Roger Goodell suspends him indefinitely without pay, calling his actions "not only illegal but also cruel and reprehensible."



#### August 27, 2007

Vick enters his guilty plea. Later, at a press conference, he apologizes to everyone – except his victims, the dogs.

After the press conference, a representative of the Humane Society of the United States picks up Vick's handwritten notes and the group sells them on eBay for \$10,200.

And that's the same with humans. They don't come out of wartime and immediately strike out. But lately we're beginning to see a little of that – and in what I think is the same ratio as humans. Also, we're not seeing dogs who are just flat-out depressed and non-responsive. So, we're seeing all levels

of the fear effect.

We don't have nearly enough information yet to say how long it will take for any of them to get through it, but if we take the study out several years and then backtrack, we'll have a much better way to predict the futures and prognosis of dogs who come from other traumatic situations.

**Best Friends:**

*So, what will this mean for other shelters and rescue groups who may be rescuing pit bulls from fighting rings or shelters that are stuffed with these supposedly dangerous dogs?*

**Dr. Frank:**

Shelters will be able to learn that dogs who show this or that kind of cowering respond best to a particular kind of approach to get them through the trauma. It will



also help with diagnosis. Right now, we're not able to turn the clock back and see what might have happened to produce this or that kind of trauma. Without the history, shelter staff and veterinarians can only say, "Well, he must have been abused."

But if we can compare what Best Friends has seen in, say, puppy mill dogs with dogs from a dog-fighting situation and then dogs

*A new friend every day! Lucas has been a friendly love-bug ever since he arrived at the sanctuary. Some say that pit bulls' deep desire to please people makes it easier to train them for the horrific sport of fighting. In that case, it's no wonder that Lucas was one of the Grand Champions; he aims to please everyone. But now that he's been removed from the violence, he's able to make people like him just by wagging his tail and giving kisses.*



## Victory Dogs Timeline, continued

### September 6, 2007

Best Friends and some other animal protection groups file a brief with the court requesting that the dogs *not* be killed, recommending strict sentences for the defendants, and educating the court on the positive attributes of pit bull breeds and the horrific nature of dog fighting.

### October 16, 2007

The court appoints law professor Rebecca Huss to represent the interests of the dogs in a separate case that will decide their future.



### December 6, 2007

Judge Henry Hudson accepts Huss' recommendation that the 47 surviving dogs be placed in rescues, including 22 to Best Friends.

Best Friends begins retrofitting special living quarters for the dogs. Each dog will have his/her own spacious outdoor play area and a cozy indoor space to come into at night.



from hoarders, then we'll have a much better idea of the effects of each kind of case. We'll be able to say to shelters: Here are the classic signs of post-traumatic stress from such and such trauma and here are some specific therapies that may help.

**Best Friends:** *Therapies such as what, for example?*

**Dr. Frank:** Our best approach when we care for animals like these will be to ease their stress to the best degree possible. Once we know everything that bothers them, we can take away the fearful stimuli. That's what's done when treating people, too.

We can also try some natural anti-anxiety medications like DAP.

**Best Friends:** *DAP?*

**Dr. Frank:** DAP is an acronym for "dog-appeasing pheromone." It's a pheromone that mother dogs secrete around their breast glands to ease their puppies' anxiety. You can get it in a bottle and dispense it out of a wall diffuser or a spray. It's also now made into a collar that a dog can wear. I've treated a number of dogs who had separation anxiety with DAP, and their people call me back in a month and say it's a miracle.

And we can also try some natural anti-anxiety aromatherapies.

**Best Friends:** *Aromatherapy? Is that really a serious veterinary approach to major anxiety problems?*

**Dr. Frank:** Yes. It's been proven scientifically that lavender essence and chamomile also have anti-anxiety effects. They don't all work on every individual, so you have to experiment with different ones on different animals. But when aromatherapy works, it's so nice.



*When we say they're getting 24-hour care, that's literally true! Dogtown co-manager Ed Fritz is one of the staff members who actually sleep with the dogs at night. About camping out with them in their doggie play areas, he says, "I'm having a ball." But, he also points out, "They snore!"*

*Little Red has scars all over her face. Her teeth had been filed down, too, which probably means she'd been used as "practice" or as a punching bag for tougher dogs. The poor thing was terrified when she arrived at Best Friends. But now she's feeling right at home.*

**Best Friends:** *What do you want people to know most about the Victory dogs?*

**Dr. Frank:** I want people to know how loveable these dogs are. These same dogs who are licking our faces today are dogs who, if they had performed poorly in the fighting ring, would have been shocked, electrocuted or hung. One screw-up and they would have been tortured.

I want to drive home to people how horrible dog fighting is because these are the most loveable dogs ever. 🐾

To learn more,  
watch video,  
read blogs and  
keep up with the  
Victory Dogs'  
progress, visit:



[www.bestfriends.org/vickdogs](http://www.bestfriends.org/vickdogs)

## December 10, 2007

Vick is sentenced to 23 months in prison.



## January 2, 2008

The 22 dogs arrive at Best Friends Animal Sanctuary.

An agreement with the court stipulates that no photos will be distributed, nor will there be any discussion of the dogs' condition until all court proceedings are completed.



## January 28, 2008

On a snowy day at Best Friends' Dogtown, and following the conclusion of court proceedings, the dogs, now named the Victory dogs, meet the press for the first time. Their new life has begun.

# A Measure of Success

Victory dogs closer to healing ... and homes

How do you track the progress of animals who come into shelter or veterinary care as a result of serious abuse and neglect?

From a physical, medical point of view, the approach is fairly standard. You take their temperature, do blood work, and so on. But what about their emotional and mental health, especially when you're working with animals, who can't tell you how they feel and what's going on in their minds?

Best Friends veterinarian Dr. Frank McMillan, who specializes in animal mental health, has been working with the Victory dogs (the 22 dogs who were sent to Best Friends for special care at the conclusion of the Michael Vick court case). And he follows their progress, or lack of it, in a systematic fashion. We talked with him about how he's been working with the dogs and their caregivers since they came to Best Friends last December.

**Best Friends magazine:** You set out to develop a system for making sure we can help the dogs through all the emotional issues they were suffering from when they arrived at the sanctuary.

**Dr. Frank McMillan:** Yes, we follow their progress in two particular ways.

First, three times a week, their caregivers get together as a group and rate each dog's level of six different characteristics: confidence, fear, energy, interest in people, personal enrichment (interest in toys, games, treats, etc.) and overall enjoyment of life. This group of assessments looks at how the dogs interact with the people they have become familiar with.

Second, once a month I do a different kind of assessment, where a person the dogs have never met goes into their room, and does various things like putting a leash on them, walking them and petting them all over, and I watch to see how each dog reacts to each of these procedures. This gives us a different take on six slightly different traits as they

occur during an interaction with a stranger: friendliness, calmness, fearfulness, aggression, excitability and submissiveness.

**B.F. magazine:** What are you seeing so far?

**Dr. Frank:** In approximately 75 percent of the dogs, we're seeing good overall improvements; a few of them are only just now beginning to feel comfortable and enjoy their lives; and two of them haven't fully turned that corner yet.

**B.F. magazine:** Wouldn't you be able to see that anyway, without these formal assessments?

**Dr. Frank:** Quite often yes, but it's easy to miss changes when they occur gradually. Here's an example involving physical health. My cat lost a full three pounds over a year, but because it happened very slowly, I didn't notice the change as it was occurring. However, if I had been weighing him once a week during that time, I would have seen after one month what I didn't end up seeing for 12 months. Psychological changes can occur in the same way, allowing us to identify changes much earlier if we measure them.

**B.F. magazine:** Do the two kinds of assessment show different things?

**Dr. Frank:** In the early days, they looked very much alike. But over the time the dogs have been in our care, their comfort and enjoyment in their people interactions have progressed more rapidly in the caregivers' assessments than the test I score. That's interesting because it shows that these dogs are quite slow to warm up to new people, but once they do they form a real bond.

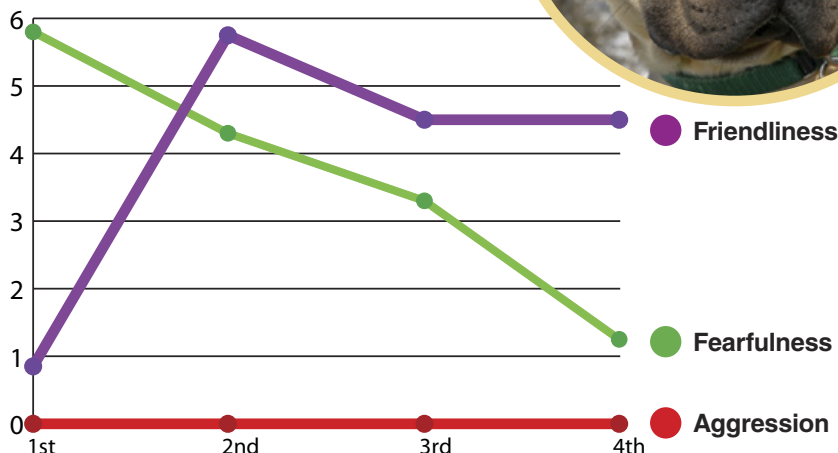
So the indications on the caregivers' assessments are mostly increasingly positive, but when a new person comes in, we don't see quite the same level of progress yet.

**B.F. magazine:** Has this kind of assessment ever been done before on dogs?

**Dr. Frank:** I have been unable to locate any systematic study done on large groups of dogs with potential psychological trauma that were rescued from conditions of great

In Handsome Dan's chart, all the indicators are going in the right direction.

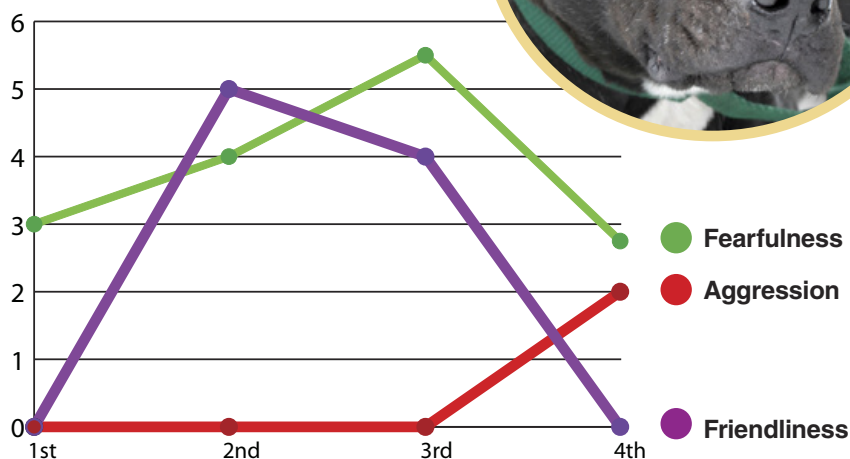
## Excerpt from one of Handsome Dan's monthly assessment charts





*Bonita is still having some difficulty making friends and building a new life.*

## Excerpt from one of Bonita's monthly assessment charts



adversity, such as organized dog fighting. I adapted the second part of our assessment from the Canine Behavioral Assessment and Research Questionnaire, which was developed by a colleague at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine. The first part of the test, in which the caregivers as a group provide the ratings, is completely new.

**B.F. magazine:** What's your overall sense of the psychological condition of the Victory dogs?

**Dr. Frank:** Dogs like these are genetically predisposed to bond with humans, but because they've had really negative interactions with people, they were at first very conflicted around people. They would want to get near but they would get scared and quickly retreat. Our goal is to overcome their learned fears so the positive bonding traits can come back up to the surface. We need to eliminate the fear, so they can act on their basic desire to form rewarding social attachments with caring humans.

**B.F. magazine:** Are you seeing anything particularly surprising?

**Dr. Frank:** One thing is a mystery: The black dogs overall seem to be more fearful than any of the others. It's a real puzzle. It may have a genetic basis, but we don't have any of the breeding histories of the dogs, so that remains an unanswered question. The dog fighters wouldn't be breeding dogs to be afraid and perform badly in the fighting pit. And they wouldn't be breeding them as bait dogs because they get those from other sources. And we are unaware of this finding ever being noted in other situations.

**B.F. magazine:** Any way of following up on this some more?

**Dr. Frank:** We're going to be doing some DNA testing. And in fact, this is going to help us in other ways. We'd like to know all the different breeds that are in the dogs who came from Michael Vick's kennels. People think that a pit bull is a pit bull is a pit bull, but that's not necessarily true. You only have to look at this group to see there is likely to be the genes of many different breeds contributing to the overall genetic makeup. Some look more like Boston terriers than typical pit bull terriers.

But medically, we're trying to understand

what appears to be causing some of the infections we've been seeing, infections that resist treatment. The symptoms of some of the dogs suggest compromised immune systems. This may be partially attributable to their breeding, but there is also the possibility that it is related to the stress and possible drug use involved in the training and fighting they were subjected to.

**B.F. magazine:** How can this work bear fruit for animals in other situations?

**Dr. Frank:** The principles of psychological trauma from one type of adversity – such as dog fighting – will undoubtedly have applications to other types of psychological trauma. And we'll be able to offer this comprehensive approach to shelters and rescue groups and veterinarians who are caring for traumatized animals themselves – giving them an idea of what psychological injury looks like, how deep the wounds are and how long they last, and, most important, the best methods for helping dogs recover so they can live enjoyable lives.

**"Almost every abused or abandoned animal who comes into a shelter has suffered some degree of psychological trauma."**

We're also going to be applying these kinds of approaches to other animals who come to Best Friends in groups.

Overall, we want to bring the same level of science to the emotional and mental health care of animals as the veterinary profession has brought to physical care. That's because almost every abused or abandoned animal who comes into a shelter has suffered some degree of psychological trauma, and we want to start documenting the diagnosis and treatment of these conditions so that they can become as routine as surgery and antibiotics and regular vet care. 🐾





## Family That Flocks Together...

When an adoption really works, sometimes it can feel like a new chapter in a family's life! It's certainly a new chapter for the three Best Friends parrots who found a wonderful home – all together.

The Nigliazzo family came to the sanctuary all the way from Missouri to meet a parrot they'd seen on the Internet. But sometimes, parrots have plans of their own! That particular parrot didn't really bond with the Nigliazzos. He just kept walking away from them. But Max, Sally and Squeakers were more than happy to meet this delightful family. So, the three of them now have a happy home.

It's particularly special for Max and Sally, who'd spent their lives as "breeder birds" before coming to Best Friends. From money-makers to beloved pets – now, that's a fresh start!



## "Yeah, We're Friends. So?"

From dog fighting to dog snuggling: These two sweethearts have learned that their fellow doggies can also be their closest friends. Talk about transformation!

Handsome Dan and Little Red are two of the dogs rescued from the property of former NFL quarterback Michael Vick. When they arrived at Best Friends, they were afraid of everyone and everything. And they slept in separate play areas to make sure everyone was safe.

But these dogs are proving to be real "Vicktory" dogs. Not only have they learned how to walk on leash, play games and meet new people, but Handsome Dan and Little Red have learned how to be friends with each other! They now share a play area where they can keep each other company and be roommates. Neither of them seems to have the slightest urge to fight or argue.

They're proving to people and dogs everywhere that it's never too late for renewal!

# Wish List

## Tasty Treats

Canned food for sick dogs • cat food for nearly 3,000 feral cats • nuts in the shell for parrots • popping corn • horse cookies • unfrosted shredded wheat • mineral supplements for goats • Temptation cat treats • shelled peanuts, cashews and almonds for pigs

## Spring Cleaning

Venta air purifier • cat bedding and sheets • manure forks (both horse-sized and sheep-sized) • industrial washer and dryer • jumbo litter pans

## A Little Remodeling

Table saw • work gloves • cat mats and rugs • built-in CD system for birds • solar outdoor light set • wildlife reptariums and covers • memory foam beds for pigs • aluminum ladders • floor squeegee • parrot perches • cat condos, forts, castles and gyms • window tint for back hoe in hot weather • golf cart • cat crate beds • carport • snow blower • tire balancer • tire installation machine • special mat for Britney the office pig

## Playground's Open!

Leashes • scratching posts • cat scratch-n-slide • dog toys • bird toys • Maze Haven rabbit playground • fly masks • Feline Funhouse • Kittywalk Carnival • cat stair-steps

## The Doctor Is In

Pill pockets • syringe pump • anesthesia machine • pulse oximeter • x-ray cassettes • IV fluid warmer • dog scale • clippers • IV pole • mobile lift table • digital x-ray • surgery patient heating unit • Gelpi retractor • orthopedic drill • blood product centrifuge • isoflurane vaporizer • Rescue Remedy

## Out in the Community

Live cat traps for ferals • large-capacity hard drives for educational materials • Mac Powerbook • 20-inch desktop display • digital camera kit • TV with DVD player for educational videos

## And one other thing ...

### Prizes for this year's Summer Raffle:

If you run a business and can contribute items for prizes – anything from costume jewelry to a Hawaiian vacation – it all makes for a great Summer Raffle this year! Call (435) 644-2001, ext. 4817, or e-mail [raffle@bestfriends.org](mailto:raffle@bestfriends.org).

*Note: If you would like to make a special donation for the Best Friends clinic, or for any other aspect of the sanctuary, please call and ask for Chandra at (435) 644-2001, ext. 109.*





## Pit Bull Summit Yields Big Changes

Should a dog be put down without a trial when his owner is arrested for dog fighting?

That is what has happened more often than not in the past but Best Friends said ENOUGH!

A summit meeting initiated by concerns expressed by Best Friends was hosted by HSUS at their Las Vegas Expo and also included BAD RAP, ASPCA, National Animal Control Association, Maddie's Fund, Nevada Humane Society, and Spartanburg Humane Society. The groups met last week to discuss the appropriate way to handle dogs seized as a result cruelty investigations into dog fighting operations. The conclusion? Every dog deserves a fair shake.

That means new hope for the furry victims of the crime of dog fighting everywhere!

From now on, the groups agreed, all dogs rescued from a dog-fighting operations should be evaluated as individuals and given an opportunity to be adopted or placed with appropriate rescue organizations following the model established in the Michael Vick case where the criminals went to jail and the dogs went to rescue organizations. Best Friends took custody of 22 Vick dogs, now famously known as the Vicktory dogs, while more readily adoptable dogs went to pit bull rescue groups and foster homes, Five(?) of the Vick dogs are now therapy dogs sharing their joy for life with humans in need of a little love and encouragement.

It's what happens when everyone comes together for the animals, and it's one more win for the underdog!

## Summer Wish List

**Afternoon Naps:** Slumber Pet Thermal cat mats

• A-Frame tents for rabbits • twin size blankets & comforters for pigs

**Fun in the Sun:** Parrot perch-

es • wicker balls for bunnies

• Feline Funhouse cat furniture • 6

foot leashes • sporn dog harnesses • horse training sticks and strings • large kongs • large teaser balls • jolly balls for large dogs • horse fly masks

**Picnics:** Unsalted almonds &

peanuts for pigs • soft dog treats

• wild bird seed • Oxbow Hay

Co. papaya treats for rabbits •

air poppers & popping corn for

pigs • nuts in shells for parrots

Mazuri waterfowl maintenance diet • stainless steel buckets • black oil sunflower seeds for goats and sheep • food for feral cats

**Summer School:** Prepaid phone cards for community services • Hardcover book for the Parrot Garden: Pathology of Pet and Aviary Birds • TV/DVD combo for wildlife education • canopies, storage shelving and collapsible dollies for L.A. programs

**Home improvement:**

Gift certificates to Lowe's or Home Depot • Reptariums & covers • Built-in CD sound system for the music-loving parrots • garden hoses • Patriot two-way radios for staff scattered throughout the canyon • ATV with dump trailer attachment

**The Doctor Is In:** Clippers • dog scale

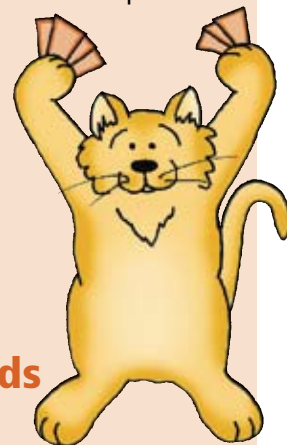
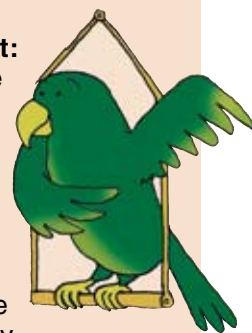
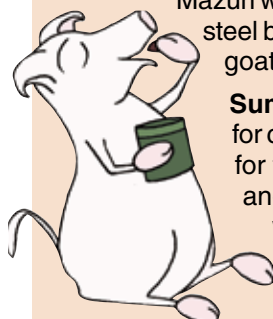
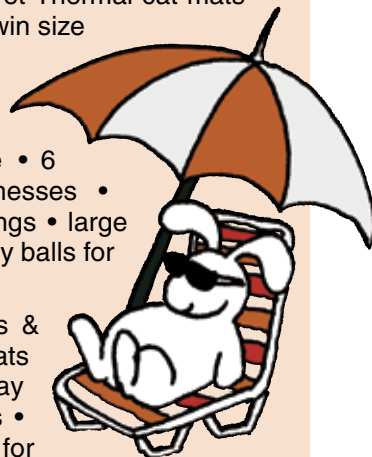
• anesthesia machine • Rescue Remedy

• Natural Plan stomach soother for horses • humane feral cat traps

**Rapid Response Rescues!** Black Diamond field boots • thermal imaging camera • Pelican cases • 14 foot flat bottom boat • 14 foot zodiac boat • 15 hp motors • heavy duty slip leads

**Your kindness has turned their bad luck to good fortune. Now it's your turn for some good luck.**

**So join the Best Friends Summer Raffle!**





# Head of the Class

Former Vick dog is a star student



**By David Dickson**

**S**how time! Oscar the dog was ready to prove what he was made of. As his Best Friends caregiver, Carissa Hendricks, stood by rooting for him, her thoughts were full of encouragement and just a hint of nervousness: *Please don't freak at the loud noise ... please don't freak at the loud noise ...*

Oscar had two fears he would be facing that day: meeting groups of people and staying calm around loud noises. The noise one was the biggie. For months, Carissa (*pictured above with Oscar*) and other caregivers had worked to help him get past those two phobias. The one thing Carissa didn't expect, however, was that both tests would happen at the same time.

There he was, walking through a crowd of strangers and doing fine. All of a sudden, one of the people pulled out a large bowl and whacked it hard. Loud noises from a big group of strangers – a

real double whammy. Carissa held her breath and waited to see how he would react. Would he keep his cool?

To her delight, Oscar did exactly as he had practiced. While he spooked a bit at the sound, he calmed down right away, which is the reaction the instructors were after. Carissa could have done cartwheels. “I was proud,” she says. “Very proud.”

The crowd-wandering, bowl-smacking tests were part of the Canine Good Citizen (CGC) classes that finished up recently at Best Friends. A national program with standardized graduation requirements, CGC classes teach dogs 10 different good behaviors, such as loose-leash walking and meeting strangers calmly. Learning these skills helps the dogs find and keep homes. Staff members

from around the sanctuary took Best Friends dogs to the classes on their own time and practiced the lessons in between classes.

Positive reinforcement is the name of the game, both in class and out.

To keep up with the  
Vicktory dogs' progress, visit  
[www.bestfriends.org/vickdogs](http://www.bestfriends.org/vickdogs)



For instance, with Oscar, Carissa could tell early on that loud noises were going to be tough. So she started by standing at a distance from Oscar and striking a bowl softly. If he didn't go into orbit, she came over and gave him a treat.

Then she came a bit closer and whacked the bowl a smidge harder. Another treat. After a week or so, she could probably have played the bagpipes and Oscar would have remained calm. The trick, though, is getting the dogs to transfer those same skills to different settings with strangers ... and without treats!

After weeks of practice, Oscar was ready for the big test. And he aced it! A perfect 10, which is required to be awarded a CGC certificate. Oscar was at the head of the class – the only dog that day to receive a perfect score.

The other dogs shouldn't feel bad, though. Whether a dog came close, or missed by a mile, if he or she learned even one or two good new behaviors, that's still cause to celebrate.

For example, there was Garth, a dog who came to Best Friends from a shelter in Arkansas. When he first came to the sanctuary, Garth was so fearful that his caregivers thought he might be deaf. Pattie Atwater, a Best Friends employee who works at the Welcome Center, decided to take Garth to CGC classes.

Pattie's biggest struggle was convincing Garth to lie down. For a fearful guy like him, that's a scary place to be. Lying down is a vulnerable posture, and Garth had already convinced himself that the world was out to get him. With patience and kindness, however, Pattie finally helped Garth turn that corner.

Best Friends dog trainer Tamara Dormer, one of the CGC instructors, describes the day when Garth finally laid down for the first time: "It was the biggest change I'd seen in any dog during the whole class." All the hard work had paid off.

Even if Garth learned nothing else in class, that single accomplishment will affect every part of his life. It took trust and self-assurance to do what he did. "I think it gives the dogs a lot of self-confidence to go through a class," explains Tamara.

Best Friends dog trainer Whitney Jones agrees. "Any kind of enrichment is good for them," she says. Whitney helped teach the classes. She, too, watched several dogs go through the entire course and come out with only one or two new good behaviors at the end. But again, nobody counts that as a disappointment.

**"It was the biggest change I'd seen in any dog during the whole class."**

Consider Atilla, who was once a feral stray in California. Like Garth, he was terrified of people. But after coming to Best Friends, Atilla joined the CGC classes. He wasn't exactly a star student at first. Truth be told, Atilla wanted to duck and hide from everyone.

But the trainers kept working with him, at his pace. And then, Atilla had a breakthrough. The trainers showed him the agility course and he thought, "Hey, I can do this!" By the end of the lessons, Atilla could walk through the "intro" tunnel on his own. That single achievement gave him confidence. (Update: As we go to press, Atilla has found a home!)

After this last round of classes, though, the Best Friends dog trainers decided something: Most dogs at the sanctuary simply aren't ready for the full-on CGC course without a prep class. Think of CGC as grad school. In the future, they plan to introduce some fundamental "good manners" classes with the same goals as CGC classes: help dogs to learn confidence, increase good behavior, and have fun while doing it. Then, after the basic course, they can try for CGC certification.

Which brings us back to our star student, Oscar. If just one dog was going to pass the CGC class at Best Friends, he was the guy to root for. Why? Well, being a model pupil isn't Oscar's only distinction. He's also one of the Vicktory dogs who came to the sanctuary from the estate of former NFL quarterback Michael Vick. The court mandated that Oscar had to pass his CGC certification before he could live in a foster home. So, while every dog benefits from the training, Oscar's success earned him a ticket to a better life. Not a bad way to spend six weeks! 🐾



*Caregivers and trainers have use of Tara's Run, a canine agility course at Best Friends.*





# Georgia Gets the Star Treatment on 'Ellen'

When Georgia the Victory dog and Best Friends Dogtown co-manager John Garcia arrived on the set of the *Ellen DeGeneres Show* in December, they got the star treatment. They even had their own green room right next door to music mogul Sean “Diddy” Combs. And inside that green room was a big, beautiful dog bed especially for Georgia.

Georgia and Garcia, two of the stars of the National Geographic Channel series *DogTown*, were guests on *Ellen* on December 15.

“This organization means so, so much to me,” DeGeneres told the studio audience. “I’m so glad I’m going to share this with you.”

When it came time to go on stage, Georgia was an absolute pro, says Elissa Jones, Best Friends’ managing producer of special projects. “Bright lights and applause don’t bother Georgia at all,” Jones says. “In fact, she seems to be getting used to it!”

Georgia is one of 22 dogs who came to Best Friends after being rescued from former NFL quarterback Michael Vick’s Virginia property, home to an illegal dog-fighting operation. Georgia was one of four dogs featured on the *DogTown* season-two premiere, titled “Saving the Michael Vick Dogs.”

On DeGeneres’ show, Garcia, who celebrated his 10th anniversary with Best Friends in December, dispelled some of the myths about pit bulls and talked about Best Friends’ decision to take the dogs when others in the animal welfare world said they couldn’t

be rehabilitated and should be euthanized. “We believe that every dog deserves a second chance, and every dog can be rehabilitated,” Garcia told DeGeneres.

Comments from *DogTown* fans poured in to the *Ellen* website. “I was very excited to see that John Garcia was on the *Ellen* show,” wrote Lisa Richard. “I watched the *DogTown* episode with the Michael Vick dogs. Immediately after, I enrolled in a course to become a certified dog trainer. I have to say it was John Garcia’s role at Best Friends that pushed me to this. I will always have him as a role model. My main wish is to go and volunteer at the sanctuary. I hope that comes true someday.”

Ellen was so impressed with Georgia and the work that Best Friends does to help animals like her that she and her partner, Portia de Rossi, gave a donation to Best Friends in lieu of holiday gifts for their family and friends.

Meanwhile, Georgia is back at Dogtown relaxing in her posh dog bed after her whirlwind trip to Los Angeles. (She enjoyed lounging in the bed so much that the *Ellen* show staffers let her take it back to Dogtown with her!)

Georgia has come a long way since arriving at Best Friends in January 2008. Read more about her at [www.bestfriends.org/dogtown](http://www.bestfriends.org/dogtown). See a clip of the *Ellen DeGeneres Show* featuring John Garcia and Georgia at [ellen.warnerbros.com](http://ellen.warnerbros.com) (search for “Georgia the dog”).



**With all the animals living at Best Friends at any given time, there are bound to be a few characters. Here's a look from each end of the spectrum!**

## **Model citizen: Little Red**

Little Red the Vicktory dog is the model citizen this time around, or should we say the model Canine Good Citizen! Little Red used to be so shy and fearful that she would hide from the world. Not so hard to understand, really, given the abuse she once had to endure at Bad Newz Kennels, operated by Michael Vick.

During her years at Best Friends, Little Red has come a long way with learning to trust people and having more confidence in herself. For example, she used to throw herself pancake-flat on the ground when caregivers hooked her up to a leash, but now she walks calmly and happily right next to them on strolls around the Sanctuary.

Recently, Best Friends dog trainer Pat Whitacre decided that Little Red had made so much progress that she was ready to be tested for Canine Good Citizen (CGC) certification. A dog needs a perfect 10 out of 10 to pass this test. In all honesty, everybody involved thought Little Red would miss one or two items on her first try, which would then let them know what to focus on next before she tested again.

Well, she surprised everyone and passed on that first time! "She's a great dog," says Dogtown caregiver Betsy Kidder. This is especially exciting news for Little Red, who, by court mandate (as with other Vicktory dogs), has to achieve her CGC certification before being considered for adoption. A regular volunteer from the Midwest named Susan, who has loved Little Red for years, had told the adoption folks at Best Friends that she would love to adopt Little Red. Everything cleared during the adoption application process, and Little Red is now living with Susan in a foster-to-adopt situation (another court mandate). Way to go, Red!



By John Garcia

Sometimes it surprises me that it's been over four years since I initially met the "Vicktory" dogs — those who endured and survived the nightmare of NFL player Michael Vick's dogfighting ring. Like almost all of us who read about them and worked with them, I formed close relationships with each.

But none more so than Georgia.

If you watched the television series *DogTown* on the National Geographic Channel, you may remember that Georgia is a dog I've had many adventures with: from traveling to Los Angeles so that Georgia could represent pitties on the *Ellen DeGeneres Show*, to appearing on *Larry King Live*, to experiencing the simple adventures (my favorites) of her just learning to be close to a person. *We shared a lot. And now we share what I hope will be our best adventure yet. We are packing up so that I can drive Georgia to her new home.*

Yes, our girl has been adopted.

Kathy Moore, a great caregiver in Dogtown, worked with Georgia to help her pass her Canine Good Citizen test, a requirement for some of the Vicktory dogs to be adopted. No small feat for Georgia, who — as part of the test — had to learn to ignore other dogs.

Georgia is going to a home committed to her being the only pet there for the remainder of her life. We think that's the way Georgia wants it and, given her history and discomfort with other animals, certainly something she deserves.

I was happy to be part of the team that worked with Georgia's new person, Amy, when she visited and I'll be staying for a few days to help Georgia settle into her new home.

When I say goodbye, I'm not too embarrassed to say that I might get a little choked up. But this is the ending we've been working toward all along. The ending that Georgia deserves, after all, is actually a new beginning.

**Post-adoption update:** *Georgia is happily adjusting to her new life and doing great with Amy.*







# *Look at Them Now!*

**The Vicktory dogs  
are ready for their close-ups**

**T**hree years ago this month, 22 of Michael Vick's dogs found new lives and new identities at Best Friends. For many of these guys, the Sanctuary will be just a stop on the way to their forever homes.

Read on to catch up with Little Red, Mya, Ray, Squeaker, Oscar and everyone's favorite office dog, Lucas. We'll understand if you hardly recognize them!



## Mya

Mya had once been forced to fight for a living. Now she's teaching good behavior skills to other animals in her new role as Sanctuary puppy socializer. Her story is further proof that it's never too late to start over in life.

When she first arrived at Best Friends, Mya was afraid of her own shadow. During her years at the Sanctuary, Mya has improved by leaps and bounds in confidence. While she remains a bit bashful, she has also found a circle of people she loves and wants to spend time with. She even pulls regular stints in the puppy building office, which is how her new gig as puppy socializer began.

To better understand why Mya was given this task in the first place, it helps to know a little about her personality around other animals. In a nutshell, she's perfect! Though people from her past tried to make her aggressive, their efforts didn't take. When her old pal Clarabell the office cat nipped her playfully from time to time, Mya would simply look for somewhere to lie down and wait it out. "She's very good with other animals," says Michelle Besmehn, Dogtown co-manager at the Sanctuary.

Given Mya's stellar track record around all manner of different animals, Best Friends' medical director Dr. Mike Dix approved her for puppy socialization. Sometimes, puppies need a positive role model like Mya. And there are always a few youngsters who could use a mother figure to tell them when they're out of line. Mya knows how to do both.

The puppy socialization exercises are also great for Mya. Like all the Victory dogs, she came to the Sanctuary unfamiliar with so much in ordinary, everyday life. Things like doorbells and front porches can be intimidating to dogs who haven't experienced much



of the world. Mya has overcome many of her fears and uncertainties over time, but until recently her experiences hadn't included puppies. She's learning right along with the puppies. For example, with a puppy named Emma, the instant after she gave her a stern talking-to, Mya checked with Besmehn to make sure that it was OK. "At first she looked like she was sorry," Besmehn says. "Mya is always trying to do what is right."

Then there was another puppy visit that Mya enjoyed recently. Pups Frisby and Froggy don't need to learn good manners. They just want somebody wonderful to play with. Mya excelled at this job, doling out kisses by the end of their time together.

## Little Red

Seeing Little Red bounce around other dogs, lick their faces and go tearing off in a fit of glee, you wouldn't know this dog was the same one who arrived at Best Friends three years ago.

When Little Red came to Best Friends, she was shut down. It wasn't until last year that she started to come out of her shell, according to Dogtown team leader Megan Larsen. "She took baby steps before," Larsen says, "but in the past year she has really started to blossom."

Larsen attributes Little Red's progress to a combination of factors, one being the "wallflower class" she regularly attends with Jamie Healy, manager of Best Friends' Shelter Partners for Pit Bulls, who has taken Little Red under her wing. The class aims to help shy dogs become more sociable and relaxed around people and other dogs.

The other factor Larsen cites in Little Red's progress is the time she spends during the day with Healy. Three days a week, Healy picks up Little Red so she can hang out in her office, something she's been doing for over a year now. "At first she was extremely

skittish," Healy says. "She just wanted to find someplace to hide."

To help with Little Red's nerves, Healy began bringing Beefcake to the office, too. Also rescued from a fighting situation, Beefcake was, as Healy calls him, Little Red's boyfriend, and having him around gave Little Red a boost of confidence. Beefcake, however, got adopted soon after the office visits began. Still, Little Red has reached the stage where she's approaching people for treats, something that was nearly unthinkable when she first arrived.

And though she might still exhibit some fear, she loves being picked up, Healy says. "You can pick her up like a baby, and she rests her head on your shoulder and closes her eyes."

Little Red is getting close to passing her Canine Good Citizen test. In the meantime, she's enjoying what life now has to offer her, which is an endless stream of positive experiences with people and other dogs. "She can make any dog play," Larsen says. "She just plays and plays and plays until the other dog plays, too."





## Squeaker and Oscar

Squeaker and Oscar couldn't have been more different when they arrived at Best Friends. But today, they're the best of friends. And that friendship has helped them heal.

Squeaker wasn't quite as frightened of people as a lot of the other Vicktory dogs, but it still took time for her to completely trust them.

"Now, Squeaker loves everyone," says Dogtown caregiver Betsy Kidder. "She has little to no hesitation when approaching people. She will pull on her leash, tail-a-wagging and run up to people." Kidder says Squeaker will even plop down on her back, asking for a belly rub. What a difference a little time and a whole lot of love and attention can make!

Oscar, on the other hand, was absolutely terrified of people when he first came to the Sanctuary. "He would hang in the back of his run until the caregivers left," says Kidder. "At night, Oscar was one of the dogs that we had to crawl in the crate to get out for walks."





Talk about a guy who's come a long way. "He follows you around and will wag his tail and play-bow and then run from you," Kidder says. "Then he'll approach you and let you give him pets. He's adorable!" Oscar was the first of the Vicktory dogs to earn his Canine Good Citizen certification. "That's a huge milestone in my book," Kidder says.

Kidder credits Squeaker with helping to bring Oscar even further out of his shell. Squeaker and Oscar have become such good friends that they now share the same run. "Squeaker spent a lot of time in the clinic laundry before moving to a dog run," Kidder says. "She got a lot of interaction with people, and I think she has motivated Oscar to be less fearful. The two of them love each other. They play really hard and frolic around their run together. When they're not playing, they're often lying next to each other under the shade units."

Both Squeaker and Oscar have discovered that people aren't so bad after all. "Today, both of them are excited to see you in the morning," Kidder says.



## Ray

Whenever he receives attention and affection from his caregivers (which happens a lot), Ray goes into a wriggling frenzy. "It's the highlight of his life to be around people," says Dogtown team leader Michelle Logan, who has been working with Ray for more than a year now.

Relative to the other Vicktory dogs, Ray was in pretty good shape when he arrived at Best Friends. He was fearful, but not shut down, like many of them were. "He was affectionate and confident right off the bat," says Carissa Hendricks, one of Ray's caregivers for the first two years. "He was also one of the easiest to work on training with. He came around really quickly."

Ann Allums (*at left*), a trainer formerly with Best Friends, worked with Ray extensively. She remembers that during the first few months he was at Best Friends, he was, to put it mildly, over-stimulated. "He would bounce up and down and grab your clothes and arms when you entered his run," she says. "He didn't know how to calm down at all."

Once Allums starting working with him and getting him to pay attention to her, she noted a big change in him. He became a much happier dog. "I was really impressed that once he started tuning in, he was really happy about working with me," she says. "The more we worked, the happier he got."

Allums performed basic manners training with Ray, teaching him to respond to cues such as "sit," "stay" and "come." Ray became so calm that he would fall asleep on his paws and tip over whenever Hendricks gave him a massage. In 2009 Ray passed the Canine Good Citizen test, a testament to how well he did in his training.

Logan thinks the only reason he hasn't yet been adopted is because he's still not great around other dogs. She thinks he'll have to be adopted into a home that has no other pets.

In the meantime, Ray is enjoying himself immensely, especially when he gets to ride shotgun in a golf cart around Dogtown. That way, he can bask in the attention he gets from his many fans.

## Lucas

From the moment Lucas arrived at Best Friends, it was obvious he loves people. He not only wants to be around humans, he absolutely *has* to be around humans.

"He was probably one of the happiest of all of them," says Michelle Logan, a team leader at Dogtown. "He's just always been happy-go-lucky."

When Lucas sees a golf cart or car or tour bus coming around the bend, he gets up on his doghouse in the outdoor part of his enclosure so he can get a better view. Lucas loves everyone he meets, and he gets down if he feels he's not getting his share of the attention. Dogtown caregivers know just what to do when Lucas is feeling blue. "All you have to do is pop him in a golf cart and take him for a spin," Logan says.

Just like the other Vicktory dogs, Lucas gets training and spends time at the dog park. But the folks at Best Friends knew Lucas would enjoy even more time with people, so two days a week, Lucas is an office dog, spending the day with executive assistant Brenda Escher (*above*) and chief executive officer Gregory Castle. Not only does Lucas get lots of attention from Escher and Castle, he also gets plenty of oohs and aahs and pets from everyone who drops by.

"Lucas is an absolute love, from the wagging tail you'd best not get behind because it can knock you over, to the sloppy kisses he lavishes on everyone," says Escher, who picks up Lucas in the morning and delivers him back to Dogtown on visiting days.

"Everyone should experience picking Lucas up from his run to take him on an outing to the office or just on a walk," she says. "There's nothing like that kind of reception — trust me!" 🐾

*To learn more about the federal dogfighting case against Michael Vick and the rescue of the dogs, read Jim Gorant's new book, The Lost Dogs.*