

N O T - F O R - P R O F I T S

# A better life for the dogs

By KENNETH R. CERINI

A few years ago, Brewster, a beautiful Saint Bernard puppy, was dropped off by his owners at a humane society. Brewster was nervous and the agency's receptionist kept him at her desk until one day, when a man entered the Society, he misread Brewster's body language, and was bitten. Normally, this would be reason to put the dog down ... only it wasn't Brewster's fault. Where could a humane society possibly turn to save a dog that it would otherwise be forced to kill? Luckily, Spirit Animal Sanctuary provided an alternative for Brewster.

"We save dogs that others couldn't save," said Barbara Schoolman, co-director of the organization. "And we do it by allowing a dog to truly be a dog."

**How was the sanctuary founded?** Spirit Animal Sanctuary was founded when Alan Papszycki, a master trainer and behaviorist, took in his first dog approximately 10 years ago. As a master trainer he worked with many rescue groups, humane societies, veterinarians and private clients. In 95 percent of the cases the rehabilitation was successful and the dog was rendered adoptable. In 5 percent, for many reasons, it didn't work. To save the dog from certain euthanasia, Al kept the dog. Sixty dogs later, we had to move out of Lindenhurst to find a place with much more land. After a year of searching upstate, we finally found 128 acres that was great for the dogs, and which we could afford – providing them with a "forever home" at which they can relax, be happy and know that they'll be safe. Most of our dogs are former Long Islanders. Four years since moving upstate, we now have 86 dogs at our Boonville facility, in addition to 15 cats, one iguana, a parrot and a few birds that we've obtained along the way.

**How are the dogs "rehabilitated"?** Well, each dog is different and each dog needs different things. They're mostly extremely nervous



**Barbara Schoolman of the Spirit Animal Sanctuary said she hopes someday her organization won't be necessary.**

dogs who were often mistreated and misunderstood. Al is amazing with them, and the interaction of the dogs with other dogs helps to rehabilitate, as well. If a dog has been socialized with other dogs, they'll understand each other and each other's body language. Al understands the dogs. He reads them and works individually with each one. We understand that no dog can thrive in a kennel alone, and so we group them with regard to compatibility, giving them the opportunity to run and play.

**Where do you see the future of the sanctuary?** Hopefully nonexistent. Put us out of business and that would make us very happy. Ideally, we would love if the need for places like the sanctuary would diminish altogether. In the meantime, we'll continue to take a two-pronged approach to running the organization. The immediate prong is to obtain funds to expand the facility and to fence in as much of the land as we can to give the dogs maximum freedom. The second prong is education. We aim to educate the public, show them that

when you get a dog, you are taking a living being into your home for the rest of its life. We don't live in a very dog-friendly society. People work 8-to-12 hours a day and when they return home tired, the dog becomes more of a nuisance than a pal. We hope to spread the word that if you don't understand the animal and all that having one entails, and you can't make a commitment that will last the dog's life, please, please don't get a dog. In the meantime, we'll continue to save dogs from being unnecessarily killed and provide them with a home for life.

**Address:** 2539 East Road, Boonville, NY 13309

**Co-Director:** Barbara Schoolman

**Director:** Alan Papszycki

**Phone:** (631) 379-2554

**Founded:** 1997

**Paid Staff:** 0

**Annual Budget:** \$60,000

**Fundraised Budget:** \$60,000

**Program Services:** 95 percent