

2009 Annual Report of the Belgian Sheepdog Rescue Trust

Submitted by:

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The Belgian Sheepdog Rescue Trust had a very busy 2009 both administratively and with actual rescues. Administratively, we have added several venues to showcase our dogs, educate the public, solicit volunteers and encourage donations. We continue to build and improve our web site as it provides the major source of information and education about Belgian sheepdogs in general and those available for adoption. We now have an ad on Belgians.com, a You Tube account, a Facebook page and a Petfinder page. Belg-L and the BSCA Notice list continue to aid us in communicating with the Belgian Community. We also have collaborated with American Belgian Malinois Club Rescue and we are grateful to them for their support.

Additions to the BSDRT Web Site

We have added several articles to our web site at www.bscarescue.com. One such article relates to identifying BSDs. We have had many dogs referred to us who were actually German shepherds, both purebreds and mixes. We have found that many people do not know that German shepherds can be solid black and long coated. Telling the difference between these dogs and a purebred Belgian sheepdog can sometimes be difficult especially with puppies. To address this confusion, we now have an article on the web site, co authored with an AKC herding group judge, complete with photographs. We have received much positive feed back from volunteers about this article.

Occasionally adoption applicants have written wondering why they have not been selected to adopt a dog even though they have been waiting several months. To clarify the steps in the adoption process we have added two new articles. One of which was written by one of our adoptive families. This article describes their experience with the BSDRT, starting with the submitting of their application to the adoption of their dog. We have also added an article detailing the steps involved, again from the start to the end of the process. It is difficult to explain to potential adopters that our mission is to find homes that match our dog's needs and that each dog has different needs. While a home may not be "right" for one of our rescue dogs given time another dog might come into the program for which they are accepted. We try to explain that we are here to find homes for our rescue dogs, not to find dogs for our applicants. This is not just semantics, but rather, it is a critical difference we hope everyone understands.

We also added an article to the web site describing the duties of being a foster home. Our most critical need is foster homes and we hope this article encourages people to volunteer as a foster. The concept we are trying to get across is that fostering is not just providing love, food and shelter to the foster dog, but it also involves preparing the dog for adoption. This preparation is different for each dog. Sometimes we take in a dog that needs very little preparation as he/she comes in with few if any issues or baggage. More often some retraining and socialization are required. Another aspect of fostering is what many fear and is bittersweet (hopefully more sweet than bitter). That aspect is the satisfaction that comes when the dog leaves, ready for a forever home only because of the hard work done by the foster. We also stress that fosters have the full backing, support and whatever help is needed by the entire BSDRT Team.

More additions and changes are planned for 2010 (See new Health page added April 2010).

Fulfilling our Mission through the Internet

Part of fulfilling the BSDRT mission statement is Public Education. Our main web site and events like the AKC's Meet the Breeds, the Eukanuba Invitational and other dog shows across the country have been the traditional method of reaching and educating the public about our rescue program. In the past we have relied heavily (and will continue to do so) on the membership of the BSCA to spread the word about the BSDRT and our rescues. But as more and more people come to rely on the Internet for information we see another way to educate the general public about what the BSDRT actually does. The website YouTube.com was suggested as the perfect vehicle for our needs. You Tube has a worldwide following and there is NO charge for using it.

Collaborating with Joe Szewculak, the co-chairs helped to create the first in a series of educational presentations to introduce the BSDRT to the world of streaming videos. With the Trust board's approval, we uploaded the first video, "The BSDRT: An Introduction" to You Tube. The video was viewed 336 times during the first three weeks it was uploaded. We received very positive feedback from members and the public. Two more videos were uploaded since that time and more are planned for release in spring and fall of 2010.

Another Resource: Social Networking

Once the You Tube idea had come to fruition it was easy enough to extend BSDRT's reach to a social networking site. Facebook was selected as it is currently the most used social networking site and also user friendly. Facebook currently has 350 million users. A site like Facebook offers the BSDRT, at NO charge, the opportunity to reach not just Belgian fanciers but dog fanciers from all over the US and as a bonus all over the world. At Facebook our web page allows us to list our available adoptions and preview our educational videos. It also allows for comments and the public is able to become a fan of our site.

Less than one month after the BSDRT's Facebook debut 186 people became fans. Some of our fans names are recognizable from the BSCA membership directory and some are just as the name implies "fans". Our "fans" located in the United States will hopefully follow our rescues, offer to volunteer or share our info with others and finally perhaps remember us when it comes time to opening their hearts and their homes to another BSD.

Spreading the word about BSDRT

In the spring of 2009 we started to notice a pattern when being contacted about possible rescues. We were being notified about dogs that were listed on Petfinder, Craigslist or and Freecycle. By far the most referrals came from the website Petfinder.com. Shelters and rescue organizations from across the US have come to rely on the Petfinder web site to publicize their animals that are available for adoption. These organizations have reported to the site owners that more than 50 percent of their adoptions are from Petfinder. Membership to Petfinder is limited to organizations that are NOT operating for the purpose of making a profit (no breeders or pet shops). Since this is a FREE service this makes Petfinder one of the most effective advertising mediums, especially for a small non-profit group like the BSDRT.

The site has proven to be user friendly and provides us with weekly reports of activity from our listing of available dogs. Besides listing our available dogs for adoption (along with their photos and our contact information), the web site provides us with a home page that we use to share information about the BSDRT. Our purpose is to encourage people to go to our main web site to learn more about the BSDRT and our mission and in hopes of broadening our application pool to find the best adoptive homes possible for our rescues.

2009 Application Report

Cathie Lang, our lead application processor, has provided us with the following breakdown on applicants.

A total of 89 applications were received in 2009 - the breakdown is as follows:

- * 5 from the Pacific Northwest
- * 5 from the South East
- * 7 from the South Central Region
- * 8 from the Rocky Mountain Region
- * 11 from the Great Lakes Region
- * 12 from the Pacific Southwest
- * 19 from the North East
- * 22 from the Heartland

While the numbers of applications submitted are high, many of the applicants withdrew soon after applying or within the first few months. The reasons are numerous. Some get dogs elsewhere, others develop health

issues or have financial setbacks and others just change their minds. In addition, we have very few dogs relative to the number of applicants which allows us to reject homes that are not good matches for the dogs available at the time the applicant applies. Many of these are good homes, but just not for our current dogs. As we said before, we are looking for homes for our dogs. We are not looking for dogs to give to applicants.

Reports of Possible Belgian sheepdogs Investigated: January 3, 2009-February 10, 2010.

During this time period 124 dogs came to the attention of the BSDRT. These dogs break down by region as follows:

Pacific Northwest - 5
Pacific Southwest - 23
Rocky Mountain - 5
South Central - 15
Heartland - 30
Great Lakes - 7
Southeast - 16
Northeast - 15
Unknown - 5

Canada - 3 (Our Policy Document specifically states that we can not extend into other countries)

Of these dogs, 12 were taken into the BSDRT program and all were fostered, treated medically and adopted into permanent homes. One dog was taken into the program and later euthanized due to illness related to starvation. All 124 dogs were investigated by the BSDRT Team or our volunteers. The other dogs were not accepted for a number of reasons. The most common reasons were: adopted out by the shelters; shelters would not work with us and/or we could not contact; in foster homes with other rescue groups; mixed breed; or aggression issues.

It Takes a Village to Rescue a Dog

In conclusion, the BSDRT Team wants to thank the many people who helped us as we investigated possible BSDs and rescued those we could. We also want to thank the volunteers who helped by fostering, transporting and identifying dogs and to those who helped us network to find people who could volunteer in a particular situation. The BSCA and the BSD community have been incredibly generous with their financial help, their time, efforts and support. The BSDRT could not function without the support of either. We have not named all of those who aided the BSDRT in this report as there are simply too many to list. However, our heartfelt thanks go out to all of you.