



The Good Work of **BADRAP**

By Missy Seu

Replacing the German Shepherd, Rottweiler and Doberman Pinscher, the Pit Bull has had its fair share of abuse, exploitation and misunderstanding.

In the 1980s, when the media began to refer to the breed as a dangerous fighting dog, the reputation of the Pit Bull as a sweetheart breed changed.

Negative publicity attracted unsavory types to the breed, and the dogs became guilty by association.

Through their nonprofit, Bay Area Doglovers Responsible About Pitbulls (BADRAP), husband and wife team Tim Racer and Donna Reynolds work to dispel the negative image of Pit Bulls, provide resources for dog guardians, and create ways to educate and activate more humane animal welfare

policies. Their goal? To help secure the future of the Pit Bull as a family companion.

Reynolds and Racer became dedicated to the plight of Pit Bulls during the late 1990s when they started visiting Oakland Animal Services. Reynolds describes, “It was a horrible place to visit back then, but the dogs were so full of soul and hope despite the utter helplessness of their situation.”

“In another era, we might’ve been drawn to help the Bloodhounds or the Rottweilers or the Dobermans—



all breeds that ran through their own cycle of abuse, exploitation, and public disdain,” she adds.

When it first began in 1999, BADRAP’s grassroots program focused its efforts on rescue and adoption services. Through the years, successes in their original program drew the attention of humane organizations across the country, which now seek them out for guidance.



BADRAP’s program has expanded to include rescue, training, dog guardian support, disaster relief, and animal welfare program models. The organization provides rescue resources, as well as programs to educate Pit Bull guardians and the public.

One of BADRAP’s community outreach programs is a quarterly fair to provide assistance to under-resourced communities. The fairs offer free training, behavior counseling, spay/neuter vouchers, on-site surgery, leashes and collars, microchips, and general support to Pit Bull guardians. BADRAP’s primary focus is on Pit Bulls and their mixes, but they “do not turn down a vaccination for a Chihuahua or training advice for a German Shepherd guardian,” said Reynolds. “If we don’t want others to discriminate by breed, then it would be wrong for us to do the same thing.”



PHOTO BY DONNA REYNOLDS



Reynolds and Racer have been approached to work with cruelty cases, some of which have gained national attention. They were front-line participants in the rescue and rehabilitation of the dogs involved in the Mike Vick case. As horrible as the situation was, Reynolds sees the outcome as having “served as a tipping point by showing the people who were paying attention that the dogs are ultimately unique individuals who defy

with overstuffed chairs, as well as an outdoor hatch. All indoor kennels also have windows letting in natural light so the dogs can look out each morning to see the sunrise. In addition, the windows provide a warm patch of sunlight to nap in at least once a day. There are also five outdoor dog runs. The large exercise area on the property includes agility equipment to add an extra dimension to playtime.

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stereotypes. Ultimately, every creature on the earth wants to be understood and treated with compassion. Pit bulls are no exception.”

In order to be prepared to take in cruelty cases at a moment’s notice, BadRap built the rescue barn. The barn serves as a “halfway house” for dogs who need to rest and recover after surviving crisis situations before moving on to foster homes or adoptive homes.

The facility sits on a half acre in the Oakland hills. The main structure is a “barn,” unlike any other. It is configured with indoor kennels. Each one has a comfortable homelike setting complete

Jonny Justice, one of the Vick dogs that Reynolds and Racer helped to rehabilitate, will be immortalized as a children’s toy in the form of a Gund plush pooch. “A Pit Bull toy, sitting on the pillows of millions of children around the country. You can’t beat that!” says Reynolds.

When asked if there has been a specific dog that has had a lasting impact on Reynolds, she is quick to answer, “Olive!”

Olive was impounded as a stray in a Southern California shelter in August 2010. She was noted to have puncture wounds on her hind leg and was obviously traumatized.



"OLIVE" PHOTO BY DONNA REYNOLDS

Olive was skittish and observed to be staring pointedly at another dog during her evaluation—earning her the label “dog aggressive.” A combination of that label and the shelter’s no-kill policy guaranteed Olive a long wait in the kennel.

No accommodation was made for her rehabilitation by way of training, play sessions, group walks, off-site visits, or time in close proximity to quiet dogs. Olive shut down, making her chances of being adopted even worse.

After two years she ended up with BADRAP, ready to begin her recovery. Initially, she was guarded and stared other dogs down. She “fluctuated between being ridiculously happy, and stiff

and wide-eyed worried . . .” This is behavior similar to PTSD.

Fortunately, as Reynolds points out, dogs are more adept than humans at letting things go. Soon, she began to greet the other dogs with a healthy interest. Her first full contact was with a dog named Elliot. Once Olive acquired a normal play style, she and Elliot soon became buddies.

Olive continued her rehabilitation and has since graduated to a foster home until her forever home can be found.

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