



JUST ASKING

BY MARY KLEST

If you see a stray dog dodging cars on a village road what can you do?

I asked Lesley Irwin, founder of Animal House Shelter, Inc. who happened upon such an incident on Lake Cook Road in the summer of 1996.

At the time, she was an Animal Science major at the University of Illinois when a friend called her to report seeing a dog being dumped on the road. A Barrington High School graduate, she had grown up in a home where nurturing and rehabilitating wayward animals was a way of life. Lesley retrieved the frightened dog, brought her home, and named her Kiley. Upon graduation from college, their journey together inspired Lesley to open a non profit, no-kill animal shelter for all breeds of dogs and cats.



Her advice if the animal can be retrieved? "I recommend people first look for tags on an animal that appears to be lost or unwanted. If none is present, then call the police or take the animal to the nearest police station," she said. She also advocates that all pet owners "microchip" their animals. "It's the best way to keep your pet safe." All the animals at her shelter are implanted with microchips upon arrival. They also receive top notch care including vaccinations, medical exams, and socialization training.

Since its founding, the Animal House Shelter has rescued, rehabilitated and found good homes for more than 15,000 dogs and cats. Kiley died from cancer in 2008. But her life's story continues to inspire Lesley. The Shelter receives about 160 new dogs a month, many of whom were scheduled to be euthanized at 'kill' shelters, pounds, and animal control facilities. "We have perfect puppies and older dogs that are well-tempered and ready for adoption. After what they've been through, they appreciate a good home."

And a good home is the ultimate goal. Adoption counselors at the shelter help to team up the right families with the right animal. Half of their dog population are pure breeds. All of the animals are socialized, fully vetted and available at half the market price. "We are an intermediary between the facility where they came from and the home that awaits them," said Lesley. She sees the positive impact of her work in the smiles of family members and the wagging tail of a happy dog, or the sound of a purring cat. "We have a great staff of dedicated people. Our adoptive families are caring people too. The animals learn that people can be good."

EDITOR'S NOTE: Animal House Shelter is sponsoring its first Dash For The Dogs on June 4. For more information, please see our calendar of events.

* Mary Klest is a Barrington-based writer and owner of Klest Communications, a content solutions company. Visit www.maryklest.com.



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