

To the rescue

Locals dedicate time, efforts to save Border Collies

BY JANE HOWARD LEE

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Terrie O'Conner accepts a wet kiss from a young dog that doesn't know that the woman and her husband Sam Ford are the key to her future.

The Mont Belvieu area couple are founding members of an organization that rescues Border Collies and the little female dog that they accepted into the rescue group recently filled a spot that opened up in one of the group's foster homes.

Found scared, malnourished and near panic in a busy Baytown intersection, the young Border Collie, temporarily named "Chevy" by her rescuers, will receive top-notch veterinary care, a place with a foster family and some training and eventually be adopted by someone who appreciates her breed and can provide the kind of life that a Border Collie needs.

O'Conner and Ford have been rescuing Border Collies for about 12 years now.

"I had a Border Collie and I got involved in Flyball (a sort of canine relay-race sport that many Border Collies seem to love) and met Sam back in 1996," explained O'Conner. "Then this just sort of fell in my lap. We heard about a Border Collie in Louisiana who was in a desperate situation and there was no one else who could help her."

O'Conner and Ford, who were not married then but shared an interest in the

Scooter poses for a photo shoot. Scooter is one of the many dogs up for adoption at Border Collie Rescue Texas.

dogs and dog sports, learned that while there were some groups dedicated to Border Collie rescue in other states, and groups saving many other breeds and mixed-breed dogs in Texas, there was no group dedicated to Border Collies rescue here. They decided that they had to do it and joined with another dog-loving friend to form Border Collie Rescue Texas Inc., an all volunteer, donation-dependent, non-profit organization that takes in Border Collies in need and settles them in foster care until a permanent home can be found for them.

That first dog was rescued, restored to good health and eventually settled into a permanent home where she enjoyed a long life.

Border Collie Rescue Texas also thrived. The partnership between O'Conner and Ford (she rescues and he's the organizer) worked well for the rescue effort and for them personally as well. They married four years ago. Together now they have four dogs at home, two of them Border

Collies. They work full-time jobs (O'Conner's is in LaPorte and provides the address for the rescue group), participate in team sports with their dogs and devote a lot of time to their rescue efforts.

The group has about 50 volunteers now, O'Conner said. Some of those people provide foster care for the dogs while others offer their time and efforts for other chores like transporting dogs, taking dogs to vet appointments and sometimes even just babysitting dogs for a weekend so the foster family can take a break.

"Everyone fills a niche," said Ford. "Our members are all over the state and we have two in Louisiana."

The group was caring for 29 dogs when they met Chevy. Taking her in put the total to 30 which is the maximum number of dogs they believe they can handle right now.

"We've had as many as 50 dogs at one time but we just had to cut back," said Ford.

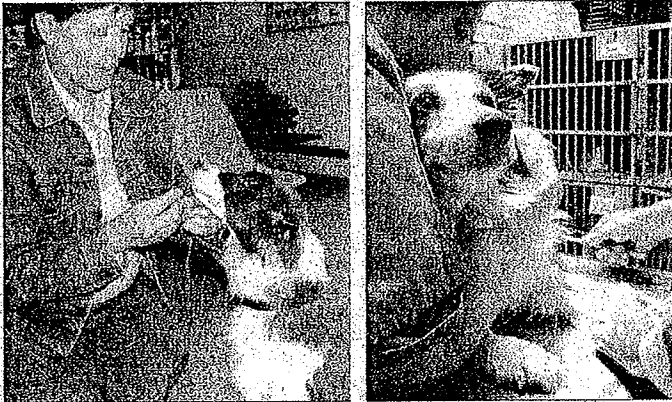
They could easily find 1,000 dogs that need their help, he said. But they are lucky to be able to assist 10 percent of them.

"It's so hard to say no," he said. "I had to turn away seven dogs last week but we just had an opening (that means one dog was adopted) and so now we have a spot for Chevy."

Not just anybody can take home a BCRescueTexas dog. Applicants are carefully screened, their home lives

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Clockwise from top: A foster dog, Fly, standing, enjoys the companionship of Terrie O'Conner's dog Bess. Fly is one of about 20 rescued Border Collies that O'Conner has fostered in her home over the past 12 years. Livy, one dog taken in by Border Collie Rescue Texas is treated at a veterinary clinic. Terrie O'Conner gets to know Chevy, the latest dog taken in by Border Collie Rescue Texas Inc.

DOGS

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evaluated, to determine whether they can offer a Border Collie a home that will suit the dogs' needs. The same goes for those foster homes that offer a more temporary haven — between one to six months usually — to one or more dogs for the organization.

The rescue group's Web site, www.bcrescuetexas.org, explains it pretty well.

Far too many people take a Border Collie into their lives for the wrong reasons, usually just that they are pretty, but a Border Collie is much more than that and don't fit into every home.

"It's like taking a brilliant child and putting them into an average classroom," said O'Conner. "They don't fit and they just get into trouble."

Border Collies are intelligent, high-energy dogs with big personalities. They are bred to work and they need a home where their attributes are put to use and their energy appreciated. While not everyone has a herd of sheep that needs tending by a dog, Border Collies are naturals for a variety of canine sporting activities or just as companions for a physically active human.

"If a person wants a dog that they can put in the back

yard for 10 hours a day, to leave alone 24-7 -- or only allowing them indoors at night, a dog that never gets out of its own backyard, never played with or talked to, is never made to think and do, is never trained, a dog they can pet only occasionally and toss down food for... the Border Collie is DEFINITELY NOT THE DOG FOR THEM!" the website says. "They should get some other breed rather than a Border Collie. Or Better Yet? Get a dog statue to put in the yard to look at occasionally. Or get a furry-fuzzy stuffed toy."

The rescue group's philosophy seems to work. They have successfully matched hundreds of animals with people, taking dogs from horrific conditions, from shelters and off the streets, like Chevy, and into a permanent placement where they fit just right.

Their Border Collies have become well known in the dog sporting activities that are so well suited to the breed. One of their rescues is now a fly-ball champion. Others compete in other dog sports or just enjoy chasing balls and catching Frisbees or jogging with their owners.

Chevy's future is still uncertain. She could end up a simple, but active companion animal or a star of the canine sports world. Whatever the future holds for her, thanks to O'Conner, Ford and Border

Collie Rescue Texas Inc., her future will be somewhere much better than that busy Baytown street corner.

To offer monetary support, to inquire about volunteering or becoming a foster home, or to learn more about Border Collies and see dogs available for adoption, visit the rescue group's website at www.bcrescuetexas.org. Donations can be mailed to Border Collie Rescue Texas, Inc., P.O. Box 1338, LaPorte, TX 77572.

Remember, there are rescue organizations working with almost every breed and mixed breed dogs. Consider adopting one of these rescued animals when bringing a new dog into the family. To find a rescue group on the Internet, just do a search for that breed, plus the word "rescue."