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ADOPTING A SHELTER DOG: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FIRST WEEKS AT HOME

Huntington, CT (June 12, 2006) – When most people consider adding a new pet to the household, they initially think “puppy”. It’s the first thing that comes to mind. Puppies are irresistibly cute, playful, and “new.” You also get the chance to bond with it as it grows into adulthood. So why adopt a shelter dog?

“For starters, you know exactly what you are getting in advance -- the dog’s size, coloring, length of coat, and personality. But, the most important factor is what you can’t see. Shelter dogs are overwhelmingly willing to please. They want to be loved, and desperately want to love you in return,” said Mary Ellen Walsh, owner of the Grateful Dog LLC and certified Association Pet Dog Trainer.

By definition, shelter dogs have been abandoned by someone. The reasons are endless. The person decided they did not have the time to care for a dog, or decided the new apartment’s location was more important than whether the landlord allowed pets. Sometimes, a human tragedy makes the dog a victim ...The owner dies suddenly, or loses a job unexpectedly and simply can no longer afford to care for it. On the other hand, some dogs get lost and are never reunited with their owners. Unfortunately other dogs have been abandoned by a thoughtless owner and forced to live on the street, or have been saved from abuse by a local rescue group. Regardless of the story, shelter dogs need homes, and make exceptionally loyal, devoted companions.

“With a little training, you can easily teach your shelter dog how to behave in your home, and become a valued member of your family,” said Ms. Walsh, a canine behaviorist with over 25 years experience. “Positive training methods can help you relate to your dog effectively and build a bond between you and your dog that lasts a lifetime.”

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A kennel situation can be extremely stressful for dogs, so it is important to make your new dog feel at home, especially the first few weeks. The Grateful Dog offers the following tips to help your new shelter dog make a smooth transition:

- **Patience:** When introducing your new dog to your home, children, or other pets -- be patient. It often takes 4 to 6 weeks for a dog to settle into a new home. Be sure to supervise him constantly, especially around children and other pets.
- **Teaching Children:** Parents must realize that it is their responsibility to teach both the dog and children appropriate behavior. Too often, a dog is blamed for reacting in fear or pain to something the child did. Dogs should not have to tolerate anything inflicted on them in order to be deemed a "good dog." Dogs can be hurt or frightened, just as we can, and it is important that children understand this fact.
- **Positive Training:** A humane trainer will understand a dog's mind, emphasize rewarding good behavior, and will teach you how to communicate with your dog. Do your homework and research reputable dog trainers in your community. Check references on their training methods used before you make a commitment.
- **Ask Questions:** Do not hesitate to ask the trainer if you do not understand the reasoning behind their methods. Be leery of outdated methods that emphasize punishment to break a dog's spirit. You are responsible for your dog's health and well-being. Never allow a trainer to do anything to your dog that makes you uncomfortable. Allowing a trainer to be rough with your dog will undermine your dog's trust in you.
- **House Training:** Every dog can be house trained, and positive, reward-oriented training works best. If you praise and reward a dog for doing the right thing, (such as urinating outside), he will be more likely to repeat that action in the future. The old methods of rubbing your dog's face in an indoor "accident," or yelling at them, merely confuse your dog and will cause him to fear you.
- **Separation Anxiety** – At first, your dog may be terrified of being abandoned again. When you leave, she may fear you are never coming back. Your dog needs a little confidence building, and assurances that you will return. Crate training, plenty of exercise before you leave, and safe toys to play with while you're away can help ease the stress of being left alone. A certified animal behaviorist or trainer can help you shorten the adjustment period, and wean your dog away from excessive dependence on you.

The Grateful Dog LLC provides private, one-on-one in-home dog training services using positive, reward-based methods. Since 1983, owner Mary Ellen Walsh has taught thousands of pet owners how to understand canine behavior and successfully train their dogs using her exclusive "think like your dog" training philosophy. For over 25 years, her calm, assertive technique has addressed common behavioral issues including excessive barking, jumping, counter surfing, leash pulling, shyness, and others. Serving the Fairfield and Westchester County areas, The Grateful Dog also offers an array of people-empowering dog training services including group classes on general obedience, show handling, and puppy socialization – each focused on communicating with your dog through the power of positive reinforcement. A champion American Kennel Club breeder, Mary Ellen advises Guiding Dogs for the Blind, Northstar Foundation for Autistic Children, and has trained virtually every age and breed of dog. For more information, call 203-929-5118 or visit www.thinklikeyourdog.com.