

A very happy ending for Rosie

Plucked from mean city streets, an injured dog gets a new home.

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ELIZABETH ROBERTSON / Inquirer Staff Photographer

Headed home to Fairmount, Rosie tugs at the leash held by Kathryn Smith. A secondary part of the story is that Smith, who was looking for work, is now an employee of Rothman Animal Hospital.

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After about six months of living on the streets of Camden, which cost her a leg and almost cost her her life, Rosie has a new home and a new life.

The young pit bull, discovered Feb. 23 by animal control officer Steven Bordi on a vacant lot in North Camden, yesterday left Rothman Animal Hospital in Collingswood for her new home in Philadelphia's Fairmount neighborhood.

"She's doing well. I think she's ready to go home," Kathryn Smith said after she and Michael Armine picked up Rosie for the trip to Fairmount. "But I think a lot of people here [at Rothman] are going to miss her."

Shelley Hill, night manager and a veterinary technician at Rothman, acknowledged the sadness: "We have three others that also need homes, but she was special. She really touched our hearts."

For the trip home, the staff outfitted Rosie with a green St. Patrick's Day bandanna.

Smith and Armine, newcomers to Philadelphia, became captivated by her.

"This dog really sort of found us," said Smith, 24, who recently moved to the city from New York City.

Smith said she and Armine, 26, a Havertown native who teaches school there, had been talking about getting a dog. Smith grew up around dogs, trained them, and worked in a kennel in her native Maine. Armine grew up around cats - but was open to canine persuasion.

"It's not that I'm biased against dogs," Armine said. "It's just that I always had cats around growing up."

On Feb. 23, Smith said, she was visiting with family in Maine when Armine called, excited after seeing a television news story about Rosie.

"He had already decided," Smith said. "He wanted us to go visit right away. He said, 'We can really provide this dog a good home.' "

The next day, Armine went to Rothman Animal Hospital to see the dog. Smith did, too, as soon as she got home.

By then, the Rothman staff had named the dog Rosie.

Despite Rosie's early hard-knocks life, Smith said she and Armine found the dog as friendly as Bordi, the animal-control officer, did the afternoon he found her sitting quietly on a piece of cardboard in a lot at Eighth and Vine Streets.

"She seemed fine," Smith said. "She was walking around, sort of hopping up and down."

On Feb. 27, vets at Rothman amputated the remaining stump of the right front leg up to Rosie's shoulder. Within a few days, said Hill, Rosie was walking, off pain medication and "eating my yogurt."

Although Rosie could have gone home with Smith and Armine then, Hill said the dog had to be spayed, and the vets did not want her to undergo another surgery that soon.

What caused Rosie's leg injury remains a mystery, Bordi said. Someone either cut off the leg, or the dog got caught in a fence or wire and chewed it off to avoid starvation.

Bordi was in North Camden on Feb. 23 to pick up two adult pit bulls that had been abandoned and chained in a backyard. On the way, Bordi got a radio call about a third, injured dog - Rosie - at the same address.

The two adult dogs, though malnourished, were in good health and taken to an animal shelter.

The events of Feb. 23 have not led to the owners - or any animal-cruelty charges - and Bordi, 49, a veteran of 20 years in animal control, says that is not surprising.

"We'll never find them," Bordi said of the original owners of Rosie and the other pit bulls.

Though yesterday's departure was bittersweet for the Rothman staff, it was not goodbye.

When she first heard of the dog, Smith was unemployed and looking for work.

Smith now works part-time at Rothman Animal Hospital, and Rosie will be returning there periodically for medical visits.

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