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## Lifesaving donations turn pit bulls into blood hounds

By Christine Clarridge  
Seattle Times staff reporter

Gage Spromberg was born into a family that kept him locked outside the house and penned in a small yard.

He often didn't have enough food or water and he never got human affection or one-on-one attention.

But he was one of the lucky few.

After being rescued by a neighbor, the pit bull is now doing work that saves lives, according to Lindan Spromberg, of Seattle, who took him from a backyard breeder nearly nine years ago.

Gage is now an "ambassador" for a misunderstood breed, she said.

Gage has donated more than 5 gallons of blood to the animal blood bank at Animal Critical Care & Emergency Services on Lake City Way, and is credited with saving the lives of countless other dogs in the process.

"Gage always knew that he was doing something good and that he wanted to do it well," said Christina Ryan, the clinic's marketing coordinator and a blood-bank assistant. "He was just amazing."

Pit bulls have gained a negative reputation following a series of well-publicized attacks on people. Earlier this month, a 71-year-old SeaTac woman was brutally mauled by two unneutered male pit bulls, who were killed by sheriff's deputies. The attack prompted some to propose banning the breed.

But pit-bull owners like Spromberg say the attacks involving pit bulls are the exception rather than the rule, and that they almost always result from owners who fail to properly care for the powerful animals. They insist the dogs can work well alongside humans and, in addition to donating blood, have been trained to work with the State Patrol and visit nursing homes.

"There's no question that there are bad owners out there and that there are always going to be people who want a tough dog," said Tara Guenard, who owns a pit bull she saved from a Tacoma shelter. "We need to get



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From left: Lindan Spromberg, Allison Dietz, Leanne Evans and Linda Ness enjoy the company of pit bulls Gage, Morgan, Diva and Nutmeg at Animal Critical Care & Emergency Services on Lake City Way.



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"I know I have to be strict with my dogs because they have to be exceptional. I want them to be good representatives of the breed," said Tara Guenard, who rescued her pit bull from a Tacoma shelter. From left are blood-donor dogs Diva, Morgan and Gage.

to that group and educate them or stop them."

Spromberg, like the owners of the other half-dozen or so pit bulls who donate at the animal blood bank, sees it as her responsibility to be hypervigilant and responsible in order to combat the negative stereotypes surrounding the breed.

Guenard said, "I know I have to be strict with my dogs because they have to be exceptional. I want them to be good representatives of the breed."

Dogs have two major blood types: positive and negative. Dogs with positive blood can accept either negative or positive blood. Dogs with a negative blood type can accept only blood from other negative donors.

Like many pit bulls, Spromberg's dog Gage possesses the rarer negative blood type that makes him a universal donor for all dog breeds.

Other breeds have negative blood, but pit bulls have a greater tendency than other breeds to have negative blood. Only about 30 percent of all dogs have negative blood.

Blood that's supplied by Gage and the several dozen other cat and dog donors goes to animals that need a transfusion because of traumatic injuries, exposure to rat poison, surgical blood loss, bone-marrow problems and other health issues.

Donors' owners are not paid; however, the animals do receive complete checkups during each visit to the clinic.

In order to be a donor, dogs must be healthy, over 55 pounds, free of medications and owners must be willing to commit them to three to four donations per year for two to three years. In addition, dog donors, who give a pint at a time, are not sedated and must be able to lie still on a table for about 10 minutes.

Cats are sedated during the process.

According to Allison Dietz, the blood-bank coordinator for Animal Critical Care & Emergency Services, and a dozen or so employees of other veterinary clinics, pit bulls and their relatives are no more likely to bite than any other breed of dog.

They point to a study published this year in the Journal of Veterinary Behavior that measured the correlation between specific breeds and aggression.

The study was conducted after a breed ban was imposed in Lower Saxony, Germany, after a child was killed by a pit bull in 2000. The study analyzed breed, disposition and a tendency toward aggression in 415 dogs and found no link.

"The results show no indication of dangerousness in specific breeds," researchers wrote in the study's abstract.

Advocates of the pit-bull breeds also say people who want to minimize the threat of dangerous dogs should push for enforcement of existing laws, bans against backyard breeders, mandatory spay-and-neuter laws and harsher criminal penalties against the owners of dogs who attack. They say unneutered dogs tend to be more aggressive.

Still, those who favor a ban or tighter restrictions say the dogs' breeding gives them a higher propensity for

unpredictable behavior and violence.

Guenard said people should also be willing to support a reallocation of tax dollars to fund more animal-control officers.

Spromberg said, "It is probably harder to control the owners than it is to ban the breed, but it would be so sad to lose these beautiful, loving dogs."

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