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Old dog, new tricks: Pit bull from Vick's dogfighting lair thrives

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OAKLAND, Calif. -- His back resting comfortably against her chest, Hector nestles his massive canine head into Leslie Nuccio's shoulder, high-fiving pit bull paws against human hands.

The big dog -- 52 pounds -- is social, people-focused, happy now, it seems, wearing a rhinestone collar in his new home in sunny California.

But as Hector sits up, deep scars stand out on his chest.

"I wish he could let us know what happened to him," says Nuccio, the big tan dog's foster mother.

Hector ought to be dead, she knows -- killed in a staged fight, or executed for not being "game" enough, not winning, or euthanized by those who see pit bulls seized in busts as unsafe.

Instead, Hector is learning how to be a pet.

Last year, he was one of more than 50 American pit bull terriers or pit bull mixes seized from a compound in Surry County, Va., where former NFL quarterback Michael Vick and others staged dog fights.

Vick is serving 23 months after admitting he bankrolled the operation and helped kill six to eight dogs. Three others also pleaded guilty.

The dogs were held as evidence in the prosecutions and then evaluated by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. One dog was euthanized as too aggressive; the rest went to an animal sanctuary and several foster care groups.

Hector's taking "canine good citizen" classes to correct his social ineptitude. And he's learning good manners from the household's other dogs. Once he graduates, he'll take classes to become a therapy dog, helping at nursing homes and the like. *AP*

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