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Getting to know a pit bull might surprise you

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IT ONLY takes one. Meeting just one fabulous pit bull, like Princess, now available for adoption at the Marin Humane Society, will help you understand why this breed has so many advocates. Just ask the folks at Autodesk in San Rafael.

On Wednesday, the Humane Society was invited to set up an adoption outpost at Autodesk and we took the charismatic Princess. Word quickly spread throughout the building that there was an "awesome dog" in the lobby and people came to meet her.

According to our outreach coordinator, Princess spent a lot of time on her back, getting belly rubs from her many admirers. She basked in all the attention.

Many people were surprised by Princess and her outgoing, friendly nature. They said that they had never met a pit bull before and had had no idea they were so loving. Several employees also said that the only information they had about pit bulls was what they got from the media.

Guess what? It's not news when thousands of nice dogs are going about their lives minding their own business; it's only news when a dog does something wrong. Judging this breed by what you come across in the media would be like judging all men by those who commit violent crimes.

What makes Princess so awesome? First of all, you can't help but notice her striking beauty - she has a yellow tiger brindle coat, which is extremely rare. She also has soulful eyes for such a young dog. But beyond her good looks, she is highly affiliative with people; in other words, she loves people.

Being with people is the most important thing in the world to her, a characteristic of her breed. Pit bulls were bred to be exceptionally loving with human beings - in fact, they are probably the only breed of dog that actually enjoys being hugged. When a pit bull bites a person or a child, that is an aberration of the breed. Temperamentally correct pit bulls wouldn't bite a human being. An excellent resource for more information about pit bulls is www.badrap.org.

If you're thinking about adopting a pit bull, how can you be sure you're getting a dog with a sound temperament? The best way is to adopt from a shelter or rescue organization that puts the dogs through a rigorous temperament testing process.

Here at the Marin Humane Society, Princess was put through three intensive evaluations with our behaviorists - and passed each with flying colors. We are convinced that this dog will be an ambassador for her breed.

We also have two exceptional pit bull mixes available for adoption who will also be ambassadors: Simba and Lucy. Handsome six-month-old Simba spent two months being fostered by a dog trainer, so he already has nice manners.

Happy-go-lucky Lucy has graduated from our foster program at San Quentin where she was everybody's favorite, and now she, too, is eager for a real home.

Good dogs don't just happen - they start out with the right ingredients and then it's up to us to provide the training, guidance and love that helps them become first-rate canine citizens. To set up these dogs and their new families for success, we are seeking homes with experienced dog guardians and offering a free (but required) dog training package.

Come meet Princess, Simba and Lucy. Not only might they surprise you - you might fall in love.