



Cesar Milan meets one of Eugene's lovely bullies

PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

Tsst! The Dog Whisperer comes to Eugene BY CAMILLA MORTENSEN

Cesar Milan (aka “the Dog Whisperer”) pulled into Luv-a-Bull Pit Bull Rescue, tucked away in the wooded hills of south Eugene, expecting to see a pit bull with a problem. What he found was a peaceful enclave littered with happy pits and pit-puppies. Doggies were draped over chairs, lounging on couches and playing in a sunny meadow. What could possibly be the problem at this idyllic Fido hideaway?

It wasn't long before Milan met the reason for his visit. A dog so vicious that Lane County Animal Services wanted to euthanize him shortly after an officer brought him in. A dog so unstable that when his caretakers tried to film him to document his problems, he attacked the camera. A dog so unmanageable that after a year at the rescue, his anger and attempts to bite drove Luv-a-Bull Executive Director Liesl Wilhardt to seek outside help from Milan, the top dog of dog trainers.

That dog was El Diablo, and he's the most vicious Chihuahua to darken a

doorstep in all of Lane County. The three-pound doggie-desperado was too much even for Wilhardt, a slim blonde Harvard-educated dog-rescue dynamo who thinks nothing of going for four-hour treks with a pack of pit bulls leashed at her side. After nine years of rescuing pits, the first dog Wilhardt couldn't train and fully control was the sort of pup you'd expect to find tucked into Paris Hilton's purse, not starving, feral and snarling in a Wal-Mart parking lot.

Not everyone agrees with the Dog Whisperer's philosophy and methods, but something needed to be done with El

Diablo, and Milan is often the last hope of desperate dog owners.

After LCAS captured him from behind the massive Eugene discount store and brought him into the kennel, it looked like he was going to be put down. The pint-sized pup attacked anyone who tried to touch him. Even no-kill shelters will euthanize a dog if it can't be rehabilitated, and crowded LCAS has limited resources for any dog let alone a dog that bites. But Kylie Belachaikovsky, LCAS's volunteer coordinator, felt that the little dog had a chance if he could just land in the right hands.

Luckily for El Diablo he escaped the needle and wound up at Luv-a-Bull with Wilhardt and her coterie of pit bull (and Chihuahua) loving volunteers, including her partner, Patrick Leiser, a pro wrestler turned pet-friendly real estate broker.

Liesl Wilhardt started rescuing pits almost a decade ago, after realizing how few resources there were for the much-maligned breed. “I've been loving pits from the time I was really little,” she says. Luv-a-Bull rescues, retrains and rehomes human-friendly pit bulls and tries to undo

some of the breed prejudice that the media have created around the dogs.

Milan too is a staunch defender of the dogs. He equates the prejudice people have against the pit bulls to the sort of racism

Milan was so impressed by the Luv-a-Bull's balanced pittypack, that he asked if one of his own pack dogs could be sent to Eugene to retire.