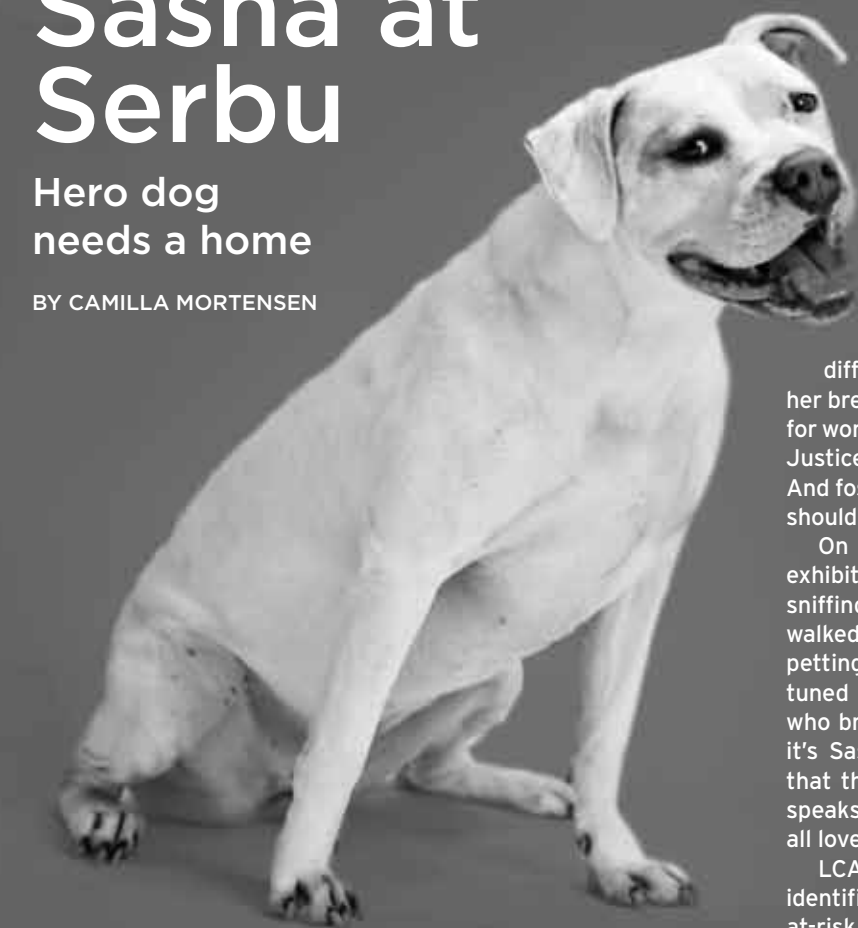


Sasha at Serbu

Hero dog
needs a home

BY CAMILLA MORTENSEN



PHOTOGRAPH BY TODD COOPER

When Sasha the Pit Bull won the "Animal Hero of the Year" award from the Oregon Red Cross for her work with at-risk youth, "We really thought that she would get adopted," says Sasha's foster mom, Micaela Frank. Frank is also the lead volunteer trainer at Lane County Animal Services.

Sasha wound up at LCAS in early November 2010, according to Rick Hammel, the program manager. The same things that might make her a difficult dog to pitch to potential adopters – her breed and her deafness – make her perfect for working with kids at Lane County's Juvenile Justice Center on the John Serbu Campus. And foster-mom Frank says the dog's deafness shouldn't deter potential adopters.

On Sasha's visit to EW's offices she exhibited her typical tail-wagging good cheer, sniffing and saying hello to every human who walked by and happily accepting cuddles and petting. Because she's deaf, "she's really tuned into people," Frank says. And Frank, who brings the dog to Serbu each week, says it's Sasha's much maligned pit-bull breeding that the kids identify with. "Her breed really speaks to that age group," Frank says. "They all love pit bulls."

LCAS behavior specialist Cindy Ehlers identified Sasha's potential for working with at-risk youth shortly after she arrived at the

shelter, and Sasha was soon on her way to her Red Cross recognition.

Frank says the breed is actually known for being very snuggly, and Sasha is no exception. "You can just pull her into your lap and lay with her," Frank says. She says the kids tell her, "When I get out, I'm adopting Sasha." She says that the things they learn about pits from Sasha – how to train her, take care of her and give her a good home, and that pits might look tough but are actually cuddle bugs – would make them good pit owners someday.

Hammel says that sometimes the very reasons a dog winds up at LCAS are the same reasons the dog might be good at specialized work, like Sasha's work with at-risk youth. He says other LCAS dogs that might have been dumped because they obsessively sniff have gone on to do search-and-rescue and been trained to become drug-sniffing dogs. "It's one of the creative things we are doing to avoid euthanasia," he says.

The kids at Serbu help train Sasha, Frank says. Together they learn doggie sign language and basic dog training skills. She says it only took 10 minutes for them to teach her how to shake paw, and soon they took her paw shake and taught her how to "wave." Now she enters the room and "just starts waving at people," Frank says.

Want to give Sasha her forever home? Email her and Micaela Frank at SashaThePitBull@gmail.com or find her on Facebook.

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