

Chagrin VALLEY TIMES

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Happy Holidays

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Photo by Michael Steinberg

Surrounded by love, Izzy, pictured at Rescue Village with owner Eileen Pritzker, came to the shelter just before Christmas last year. Brought back to health by foster family (from left) Hanna and Mary Crone, Izzy is now Ms. Pritzker's best holiday gift after losing her husband just three weeks ago. The owner and foster family reunited last week at the Russell Township shelter, led by Director Ken Clarke, (pictured at rear).

For the love of Izzy

Adoption: the gift that keeps on giving

By SUE REID

In this season of giving, Rescue Village has its own story of holiday

magic.

It begins with a dog once named Cedric, now Izzy, whose path to a forever home resulted in one incredible gift for his owner.

The journey also demonstrated the length that a community of dog

lovers, including one special foster family, would go for the love of an animal.

Izzy's story began when the mahogany-colored Siberian Husky came to Rescue Village about a year ago, just days before Christmas, as

part of an owner surrender.

Rescue Village Director Ken Clarke explained that Izzy, just two years old at that time, was in an abusive situation along with 13 other huskies which were kept in a

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Art by the Falls moves to Polo Fields during bridge project

By SUE REID

In light of the North Main Street bridge project slated to begin in February, the Valley Art Center will relocate its annual Art by the Falls event for the next two years from Riverside Park to the Cleveland Metroparks Polo Field in Moreland Hills.

This announcement followed a decision by the Center's board of trustees, VAC Director Rebecca "Bec" Gruss said last week.

"In the best interest of our artists that we serve and the village residents and merchants, the 2024 and 2025 Art by the Falls will be relocating to the Cleveland Metroparks

Polo Field during the North Main Street bridge construction," she said.

The event will take place next year from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. June 8 and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. June 9.

The board put substantial thought and energy into this important decision, Ms. Gruss noted, calling it a "win-win" for everyone.

She said moving the event, which draws upwards of 20,000 people over the June weekend, alleviates stress on the downtown parking and traffic flow that will be greatly impacted by the bridge work.

According to project specifications, the contractor is to halt work

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New Year's Eve ball drop right here at home

By SUE REID

A completely refurbished Popcorn Ball will be center stage on New Year's Eve for the 11th annual Popcorn Ball drop, held fittingly on "123-123," Chagrin Falls Popcorn Shop owner Dewey Forward said.

"We have an inordinate amount of fun at this event," Mr. Forward, who has owned the iconic popcorn shop since 2000, said.

Born from an idea written on the back of a piece of paper, the annual celebration is embraced by the local community.

"This idea," Mr. Forward said,

"we didn't think we could pull it off, and 11 years later, it's roaring. There are so many laughs to it."

The evening's festivities begin at 10:30 p.m., when hot chocolate, cookies and historic films are presented in Township Hall at 83 N. Main Street. The crowd moves over to the Triangle at 11 p.m. in anticipation of the 240-pound, 6-foot-in-diameter popcorn ball making its ceremonious drop.

At the stroke of midnight, retired Chagrin Falls police chief James Brosius will ignite the historic village cannon, launching 200 popcorn

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very confined space.

Upon rescue, it was apparent that Izzy didn't fare as well as the others in the pack.

"All of the dogs were in relatively good shape considering their environment, but Izzy had hip dysplasia, which made it a very special case," Mr. Clarke said.

So special, that the dog, with ocean blue eyes, needed an exorbitant amount of medical care.

"Izzy was not the typical case, and thank God not all animals need this level of care," Mr. Clarke said.

The animal shelter not only did a special fundraiser at that time, raising \$8,000 to cover the expense of surgery, but supported Izzy through physical and laser therapies that were required.

Rescue Village also provided access to foster care for Izzy. Having remained at the shelter long after his fellow rescues, the skinny, sick and once-shy dog with complicated medical issues found a temporary home with the Crones of Willoughby Hills.

For nearly two years, the Crones had been fostering dogs with behavioral issues, or dogs which had been mistreated and ignored.

They served as that loving bridge for Izzy until adoption took place.

"We were looking for a family who could take on a special case," Mr. Clarke recalled. "We needed someone on board who could take this dog that so needed this rehab."

"When we got him, he was presented to us as a possible hospice case," Mary Crone said. "We didn't know the outcome."

Having always loved animals and with a houseful of their own, the Crones helped Izzy not only walk, but come out of his shell.

"He was very quiet, but so lovable," Ms. Crone said.

Izzy was with the Crones for several weeks, beginning in March.

He returned to Rescue Village months after he first arrived, staying there longer than most animals. Then, on June 6, the day he was up for adoption, 84-year-old Eileen Pritzker walked in the door.

The Beachwood resident said she regularly drove by the Russell Township shelter on the way to visit her husband, Herbert, who had been in a nursing home.

"My family thought it was time I get a dog," she said.

Izzy - aka Cedric -- would fit the bill.

"That's the one, Grandma!" Ms. Pritzker



Photo by Michael Steinberg

Izzy, a 3-year-old mahogany Siberian Husky, loves kisses, car rides and his toys. He stole the hearts of staff at Rescue Village and his foster family before finding his forever home.

recalled her granddaughter saying upon spotting Izzy at Rescue Village.

With tears in her eyes, she picked the dog she would quickly rename "Izzy" to be by her side.

"He was beautiful, and just so alive and friendly," Ms. Pritzker said. She didn't know much of his background, but only that she was lucky to have him and he to have her.

The two went everywhere together, including drives where he would find his spot in the back seat. At home, he enjoyed running in her back yard.

Izzy instantly became her "bed buddy," and three weeks ago, that became much more of a gift.

That is when Ms. Pritzker's husband of 63 years passed away.

Ms. Pritzker and the Crones met for the first time last week, both sharing the gift of adoption and a message for others and to one another.

"If someone is alone, adopting a dog is very important," Ms. Pritzker said with emotion.

Serving as a foster family is equally vital to the work of Rescue Village, Ms. Crone said.

"It's very rewarding," Ms. Crone said.

"You see the shape these dogs are in coming into Rescue Village, then you see the

transformation."

"It's amazing," she said. "Anyone would be lucky to have any of these dogs that come through the doors."

Rescue Village takes in more than 2,000 animals each year and provides complete veterinary care to each, including spay and neuter surgeries.

And while any time is a good time to adopt, the gift carries that much more meaning during the holiday season.

To make the gift of adoption easier, throughout December, thanks to a \$20,000 gift from Embrace Pet Insurance to Rescue Village and as part of its Holiday Adoption Campaign, all adoption fees for cats and dogs are covered.

"People can come in and get their 'Izzy,' with the help of Embrace," Mr. Clarke said.

"Bringing that furry family member into the equation really helps us with our loneliness or need for companionship and the desire to care for someone," Mr. Clarke continued. "That comes into play, the emotional side of the holidays."

That was truly the case for Ms. Pritzker.

"I want to thank you, really," she said to Ms. Crone, while Izzy ran between the two for hugs and kisses.

"We are happy you took him," Ms. Crone responded. "He is amazing."

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during both Art by the Falls and Blossom Time, as well as other downtown events such as the annual Sidewalk Sale, among others.

To keep a strong connection to the downtown during the event, Ms. Gruss said free trolley service will be offered to festivalgoers from the Polo Field to enable them to shop and dine in downtown restaurants. They may leave their cars parked at the Polo Fields, then trolley to town.

"I think this is the correct decision for both Art by the Falls and the village during the bridge construction period," Mayor William Tomko said. "I understand that they will be running a shuttle service between the Polo Field and the village so their visitors can still come to Chagrin and continue to enjoy the village."

"We look forward to their return once the construction period is through," the mayor added.

After the holidays and in the new year, Ms. Gruss said the Valley Art Center will be meeting with the Merchant Association to talk about other ways it can be of support. One idea is for merchants to have a presence at Art by the Falls, possibly handing out coupons, for example.

"We are super cognizant that the festival brings shoppers to village, but it also take up spots from parking," she said. "It's kind of this delicate balance, and we want to do what's right for everybody."

Merchant Association President Molly Gebler said this week she is sure that this decision was not easy to make for the Valley Art Center.

"We will support them in their new location in 2024 and welcome them back home to Riverside Park when they return," Ms. Gebler said.

Ms. Gruss noted that 2024 marks the 40th annual Art by the Falls, making it a big year for her organization and an important decision in moving it.

"First and foremost, we have to think about the artists we are serving," she said.

Art by the Falls, held rain or shine, features roughly 130 artists and is the largest fundraiser for the Valley Art Center on Bell Street. Funds raised represent 10 percent of its \$500,000 operating budget and are used to support all Center functions.

"That is pretty substantial for us," Ms. Gruss said.

Ms. Gruss said an agreement has not yet been signed with the Metroparks, nor has a fee to reserve the event at the Polo Fields been determined, but she does have the support of Moreland Hills Mayor Ethan Spencer to hold the event in his neighboring village.

"Details still need to be nailed out," she said.

That includes with the merchants. "We will see from them what might be helpful," Ms. Gruss said. "We want to keep that connection strong."

Ms. Gruss added that the Polo Fields is a location close to town that meets all requirements as far as parking and flat areas for art displays.

She said the board considered many other locations, and has been mulling over this decision for a while.

"We thought of other ways to stay in the downtown, but all would have caused even more chaos for residents and merchants," Ms. Gruss said. "The board believes this is the best answer for all parties involved."

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balls into the crowd.

Chagrin Hardware's Rob Schwind and Scot and Will Butler are the engineers, mechanics and "master minds" of the ball named "Jupiter," Mr. Forward said, which had once been in sad shape.

"We chipped off all the old popcorn and re-foamed and 'mushed it,'" Mr. Forward said, resulting in the ball's expanding and surrounding the "popcorn" and looking just like the real thing.

"It's even the right color," he added with a laugh.

At six feet in diameter, the giant popcorn ball is big enough to hold the equivalent of 13,488 three-inch popcorn balls.

Mr. Forward even shared the holiday tradition during a segment filmed over the summer on "Good Morning America."

Pulleys and ropes play a part in what is now a team effort, where about 12 people bring forth the popcorn ball at this annual event that has grown in both in size and popularity. The first crowd was about 500; more than 1,500 are expected next weekend.

"I'm pleased and surprised it's gone this long," Mr. Forward said of the event. "Every year, it gets more fun. I'm shocked the first year that everyone showed up."

People will also be dancing in the streets as a deejay spins tunes starting at 11 p.m.

"It is such a fun party," Mr. Forward said. "There is always excitement in the air."



In preparation for the annual New Year's Eve popcorn ball drop, Sue Hogan, of the Merry Pranksters, student Laura Burgess, poster contest winner, and Dewey Forward stand outside of the iconic North Main Street shop.

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