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 from the July 16, 2003 edition



**TAKE ME HOME:** Tina Lemay snuggles her new puppy, Dobby, which she adopted from Animal Shelter Inc., in Sterling, Mass. The shelter brings puppies from Virginia, where there are too many unwanted dogs, to Massachusetts.  
 SHANNON SHAPER

## SOUTHERN DOGS MOVE NORTH

By [James Turner](#) | *Special to The Christian Science Monitor*

STERLING, MASS. —

On a sunny September afternoon, a reunion is being held in Sterling, about 30 miles west of Boston. But these aren't middle-aged high school alumni swapping tales of school days. Instead, half of these attendees bark. Welcome to Homebound Hound Day at Animal Shelter Inc. Today, former strays will become reacquainted with the people who helped find them their new homes.

Decades ago, a prospective puppy owner might have been able to find a roadside sign advertising mutts available for adoption. But because of the success of spay-neuter programs in New England, those days are over.

As a result, area residents who are trying to find a young dog often have a frustrating experience.

The experience of Lorri Novotny of Nashua, N.H., is typical. "We looked ... all over the place, and we could not find any puppies," she says.

Yet while there's a shortage of puppies in Massachusetts, there's a glut of homeless canines in parts of Virginia.

There, some people claim that unspayed dogs are more effective hunters, and the number of unwanted puppies has traditionally been much larger than local citizens could adopt. As a result, puppies were routinely destroyed by town pounds.

This led a few creative animal advocates to ask the question: Why not relocate the puppies to areas where the demand exceeds the supply?

"It's a win-win situation for us," says Leigh Grady, director of Animal Shelter Inc. "We have a chance to place them in loving homes here

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 With a running time as long as its title, 'The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford' strives for epic status. Once in a while, it succeeds.

in New England, and it helps [the Virginia shelters] alleviate some of their problems, as well."

Each Thursday about 6 a.m., a van leaves Virginia with 30 to 40 puppies.

"Everybody's in a cage, except every once in a while I do have [a puppy] riding shotgun, up front with me," says Lynda Conrad, treasurer of the Southside SPCA in Meherrin, Va., who is usually the driver. "It's very quiet - people find that hard to believe - but once they get in there and the air conditioning gets turned on, they just lie right down and go to sleep."

About noon, the van will rendezvous in New Jersey with a vehicle that has traveled south from Massachusetts. It will take the puppies the rest of the way.

Once at the shelter, the puppies are neutered and then they go through a sort of canine assembly line.

"It's mass chaos," says Ms. Grady, "there's just puppies everywhere. Usually all of our staff members are here for the day, and we're cleaning ears and spraying them with Frontline [flea control] and checking their toenails and making sure their incision sites are clean. It's like a chain. They go from place to place to place to place."

After the dogs have been cleared, they are ready to meet their new owners, some of whom have been waiting for hours. "Our earliest was 3:45 in the morning," says Grady. "They slept in their car with pillows and blankets. People come from as far away as New York and Maine."

"It went very smoothly," says Ms. Novotny, the New Hampshire woman whose family adopted a dog from the shelter. "We had all of the information we needed online, so we knew when to be here. We knew which batch of puppies we wanted to look at, [so when] we walked in, they directed us to the right pen, and we just took it from there."

Once the new owner and puppy have been matched, the shelter provides a 30-minute training class on basic puppy care, a dog collar and leash, and a veterinarian visit in return for the \$250 adoption fee.

As a result of the program, Conrad has seen a dramatic change in the 12 Virginia counties her shelter services.

"We've also gotten in touch with [other] local dog pounds, and they will now call us when they have puppies, so we'll go and get them and save them, and keep them from having to be euthanized, because that's what would happen if we didn't."

The dogs' new owners couldn't be more appreciative of the shelters' efforts.

Loretta Smith of East Taunton, Mass., adopted a collie-chow-keeshond mix. "I can't thank them enough," she says. "We got a wonderful dog, it took a lot of pain away from losing my other dog. He's been nothing but a joy. Everyone says what a wonderful dog and how intelligent and how beautiful he is."

The Massachusetts shelter, which also flies in stray dogs from Puerto Rico, is funded entirely by surrender and adoption fees. These cover the roughly \$25,000 a month it costs to run the facility.

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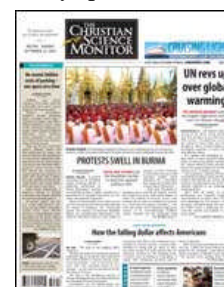
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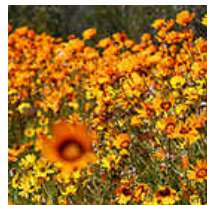
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