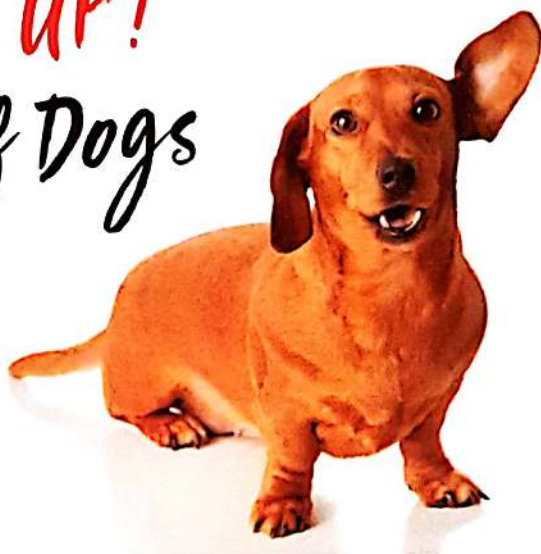


By NANCY HASSEL



SPEAK UP! for Deaf Dogs



Have you ever thought about adopting a dog that might be overlooked because he can't hear? As you'll see, there are many organizations that help make life better for our hard-of-hearing four-legged friends.

Deaf Dogs Rock

In 2010, Christina Lee volunteered from time to time, taking photos of the dogs for adoption at the City of Salem Animal Shelter in Virginia. She got a call from the then shelter director, Rebecca Custer: "We have a 10-week-old

Boxer puppy dumped near the river that is emaciated and deaf. Do you think you can come down and meet him? Possibly foster him?"

Christina hesitated, as she had three dogs of her own and didn't know anything about deaf dogs. She credits her husband, Chris. "He talked me off the ledge, saying we'll take him to puppy classes and learn all we can about caring for a deaf dog."

Later, a local news station did a story on Nitro, and everything took off from there. Christina's inbox was full of emails from viewers saying, "We just adopted a deaf puppy; what do we do?" or "I would like to adopt a deaf dog; how do I find one?"

Not only was Nitro — who is now 8 — one of Christina's first foster failures, but he is the reason she started Deaf Dogs Rock.

In August 2011, Christina launched the Deaf Dogs Rock website (deafdogsrock.org) to educate other pet parents with deaf dogs and

help find homes for displaced and shelter deaf dogs. Now Deaf Dogs Rock helps shelters across the country by listing their deaf dogs on the website. It also has informational videos on caring for deaf dogs.

Deaf Dog Rocks became an official nonprofit organization in 2014 and has since been raising money to help deaf dogs get out of shelters, into foster care and eventually adopted. To date, the organization has sponsored almost 400 deaf dogs within their partner rescues nationwide. There are many breeds on the Deaf Dogs Rock website available for adoption, and the website has helped more than 3,000 deaf dogs find homes throughout the country.

Thinking about adopting a deaf dog? "Spend some time on our website," says Christina. "We have a tremendous amount of information on how to properly care for your newly adopted deaf dog. Keep a routine that your dog gets accustomed to and teach your dog hand signals when you begin training. This goes for hearing dogs as well, in case they lose their hearing as seniors; they will be used to the hand signals and make the transition of not being able to hear like they used to better."



Christina Lee and her husband, Chris, have four deaf dogs: Nitro (Boxer), Bud (Boxer), Bowie (Boston Terrier) and Cornell (Heeler) and two hearing seniors: Tallulah (a Chug) and Pepe (Chihuahua).

Christina plays a lot of scent games and hides treats to keep the deaf dogs engaged. "At my farm we have a lot of safety precautions like double latching our gates, and our dogs are attached at the harness and collar when we walk — a double fail so if the collar came undone for some reason, our dogs are still attached at the harness."

Deaf Dogs Rock gets about three adoption listings and two to three requests for help daily. Check out Deaf Dogs Rock's Facebook page to learn more about deaf dogs and deaf dogs in need of help at facebook.com/deafdogsrock.

"A deaf dog is just like any other dog," Christina says. "It's a dog first, breed second and deaf third."

A new life for Norman

Norman was in a municipal town shelter for two years. He is deaf and a Pit Bull — not the easiest dog to adopt, but those are the two things that made Andrea Gallo fall in love. A volunteer at the Town of Islip Animal Shelter, Andrea remembers when Norman first arrived at the shelter.

Found on Long Island, New York, in a hole in a field with bungee cords wrapped around him, someone saw Norman and called the animal shelter. When animal control got there, they whistled and called out

for him, but they got no response. Eventually they found him. The animal control officers thought he was deaf, and they did informal testing at the shelter, making noises and banging dog bowls. Norman didn't respond.

Andrea was a new volunteer when Norman was brought in, and the trainer on staff noticed her interest in Norman. The trainer showed Andrea the sign for "sit" with hand signals she was teaching him, and Andrea became Norman's volunteer. Andrea started working with him on a regular basis and went on to teach him with hand signals: stay, down, come, give paw and thumbs up for "good boy."

She wanted to adopt Norman, but had a dog-reactive Husky, Kozy. Their initial meet and greet didn't go well. With permission from the shelter director, volunteers with the liaison nonprofit working with the shelter at the time took Norman to Andrea's neighborhood, and they walked the dogs together at least 15 times to get them better acquainted. With time, patience and perseverance, the two dogs ended up being buddies, often napping together. Kozy passed away in 2016, and Norman is now the king of the household.

Andrea continues teaching him more hand signals. "He knows so



Norman has learned just about every command through hand signals.

many signals now and is so in tune with me that I can't even think of all of them," she says. "It is just second nature in our house."

Andrea says that if you're thinking of adopting a deaf dog, don't hesitate. "Having a deaf dog has its advantages," she says. "They constantly watch you for direction, they are not scared of fireworks, thunderstorms, doorbells or loud noises and are actually very easy to train. If you have another dog in the house, your deaf dog will pick up on the other dog's signals."

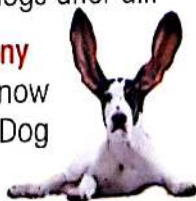
She says to never overlook a deaf dog. "They make wonderful pets. And if you live in an apartment, you won't have to worry about your dog barking in your apartment from hearing noisy neighbors or people walking by."

Educated in dog training, Andrea trains for clients and still volunteers at the shelter. You can follow Norman's (aka NormButt) daily antics and adventures on Instagram @just_norman_wallace. 🐾



#PawsForThisCause

- 🦴 **Think about adopting a deaf dog**, as they can be easily overlooked and thought of as being difficult to train. You can see from both of these stories that deaf dogs make wonderful pets.
- 🦴 **Have your own deaf dog? Make him a deaf-dog influencer** on social media or locally in your community to show people that they make wonderful pets — and are just regular dogs after all.
- 🦴 **Find out if your local animal shelter works with any organizations that help with deaf dogs.** Let staff know about organizations like Deaf Dogs Rock and Deaf Dog Rescue of America (deafdogrescueofamerica.org).



Nancy Hassel is the pet parent of Pit Bull Cody and the president of American Pet Professionals, an award-winning business networking and educational organization for the pet industry since 2009. Nancy travels the country as a speaker, media and public relations specialist, working with pet companies in many aspects including event planning and training for pet professionals. Find her on Instagram and Twitter at @AmericanPetPros.