

Rescuing and Placing One of the Most Misunderstood Breeds

Many people fall in love with the look of these dogs but know very little about how different they can be. Not a dog for everyone, many find their way into shelters, or in a worst-case scenario, find themselves dumped on the side of the road in a blizzard. Janet Noll is working hard to change that.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Today's Pet Game Changer is Janet Noll, the Support Council President of the Saluki Tree of Life Alliance, Inc. (STOLA), a 501c3 rescue organization
- STOLA's mission is rescuing, rehabbing, and rehoming Salukis, and educating prospective adopters and the public about this rarest of breeds
- STOLA's adoption success rate is outstanding thanks to their approach to preparing dogs for rehoming, matching the right adopters with the right dogs, and providing ongoing mentoring to adoptive families

For those of you who may be first-time visitors or unfamiliar with our Game Changer award, it's a platform I launched during COVID to demonstrate that even during dark times, there are always sources of light like the Game Changers we've introduced to Healthy Pets, and now, bark & whiskers readers.

Game Changers are genuinely good humans from all walks of life working hard in the trenches, doing everything they can for homeless, abandoned, abused, and otherwise vulnerable animals in need. Some of the Game Changers, like today's guest, Janet Noll, work with a particular species or breed they're passionate about. Janet was nominated for a Game Changer award by Cherie F. Janet is the Support Council President of the Saluki Tree of Life Alliance, Inc. (STOLA).

STOLA's mission is rescue and education for the Saluki dog breed. The organization saves Salukis from kill-shelters, abusive situations, when individuals can no longer properly care for them, or when help is needed in natural disasters. They heal the dogs' physical and emotional wounds and place them in loving, adoptive homes.

STOLA also works with breeders to rehome adult Salukis who have been returned to them, provides "rescue prevention" education and mentorship programs to reduce the number of Salukis needing rescue, and helps relocate Salukis temporarily or permanently in case of natural disasters.

Two Decades+ and 1,000 Salukis Rescued

Janet has been around sighthounds most of her life, starting with the Afghans her cousin's family raised. As an adult, she developed a passion for Salukis.

"In my opinion, there's no other dog in the world for me, but they're not a dog for everyone," says Janet, "which I'll explain in a bit. In, I would say, the late 90's, there was no rescue group for Salukis on a national basis.

A long-time colleague of mine knew there was a need for a Saluki rescue, and in May 2000, STOLA, the Saluki Tree of Life Alliance was launched as a 501c3 rescue organization, and I joined the group a couple of months later.

*We're like-minded people who share a passion, obviously. We patterned STOLA after the **Chaordic Principles**. We divided the country into three regions, each with a regional coordinator, and let each regional coordinator make their own decisions about the Salukis they rescued regarding foster homes, transportation, fundraising, and veterinary care.*

Our common goal is to ensure each dog is as healthy as possible before going to their forever home. We rely very heavily on our regional coordinators to take the ball and run with it. I started out as a regional coordinator for the mountain region. We have the eastern, the mountain, and the western regions. I've continued in that role for 22 years.

Sometimes I could shoot myself, but most times it's wonderful. We're an all-volunteer organization with about 1,200 volunteers at the moment. The work requires an incredible amount of devotion, passion, and time as is the case with any rescue. That's sort of the basics of what STOLA is and how it started. Over the course of 22, now coming up on 23 years, we've rescued about a thousand Salukis."

Salukis Aren't for Everyone

Janet says that the Saluki is a very different type of dog, and I absolutely agree. There are dogs, and then there are sighthounds — and I mean that most respectfully! Clients come to me for breed counseling, and many are attracted to sighthounds, because let's face it, Afghans and Salukis, and many of the other sighthound breeds, are majestic and beautiful — but incredibly different than other dog breeds.

People fall in love with the look of a dog, but if you're interested in a Saluki, I recommend you meet as many as possible so you can get a feel for just how different they are.

"I'd say 100% of our dogs come from unfortunate situations in which they're misunderstood," says Janet. "A couple of weeks ago, we learned of a Saluki who was dumped in the middle of a blizzard in Wyoming. Just kicked out of the truck and left on the side of the road.

She was incredibly hard to catch, but we ended up getting her. She's in a foster home in Colorado now. Those circumstances happen all the time, Dr. B.

But I will say the Saluki breeder community is very supportive. For the most part, those breeders know where their dogs are, and stay in touch with the people who have them. We don't see a lot of rescues from people who bought a dog from a breeder.

Now, we do work with breeders to help them find homes for dogs who come back to them. But for the most part, our rescues come from shelters, from animal control, and from hoarding situations. I remember we had to take care of 49 Salukis on the East Coast in the early 2000s. We had just formed the organization, and it was incredible what the community did, helping us with those dogs."

My guess is that many of the Salukis who are abandoned or relinquished are poorly bred in puppy mills and sold through retail outlets. There's no process to qualify buyers beyond their ability to pay — which translates to uninformed, rookie owners who have no idea what they're getting into. If STOLA has rescued about 1,000 dogs over the years, that is quite an achievement given how rare the Saluki breed is.

Preparing Dogs for Adoption and Mentoring Adopters

I asked Janet what her organization does to help prospective adoptive families understand the differences and uniqueness of the breed.

"We vet our adoptive homes incredibly well," says Janet. "As a group, we have rules and regulations. Fencing is a requirement. Now, a lot of people don't agree with that, but those people don't really understand that a rescue dog isn't going to completely settle into a home for months or even longer, depending on what situation they come from."

And we mentor our adoptive families throughout the process. Watching a Saluki that we've taken under our care eventually go into a home and seeing what they look like one, two and three years later, it takes my breath away to see the transformation. Mentoring is a huge part of what we do."

It's clear that what Janet loves most about her work is watching that transformation process — watching animals relax into a safe, loving environment that allows them to achieve their full potential.

"I think it's the reason I do what I do," she replies. "I've fostered many dogs over the years. We had another hoarding situation in Atlanta several years ago, around the same time that Michael Vick had his issues. Lots of pit bulls were coming into the shelter there, and on top of that, 17 Salukis."

I fostered two, placed one and kept the other. This poor little thing, we couldn't touch her for two months. We could not touch her. We fed her by hand and let her make her own decisions about interacting with us. When she finally allowed me to pet her, I cried all afternoon."

She lived the rest of her life with me and loved being in her pack and with us. That's what I love about what I do. I love being able to help a Saluki find their way to a home and watch that transformation. That's what it's all about."

Learn All You Can About the Breed You Hope to Adopt

If you'd like to learn more about Janet's organization and the Saluki breed, you can visit the **STOLA** website, where you can also inquire about the book "Only Angels: How to Raise and Train the Perfect Sighthound," by STOLA Support Council member Cherie Fehrman. They also have **Facebook** and **Instagram** pages.

If you have questions about the breed and whether a Saluki might be right for your family, you can ask Janet and her team questions at any of the three sites. Finally, I asked Janet what one thing she'd like to share with the world.

"I think we all would like to live in a perfect world where dogs aren't found on the street, are taken care of, and when adopted, stay in their adoptive homes for life," she replies.

"That world doesn't exist. My advice is, do your homework. Decide if this rare breed is right for you and your family. Go to dog shows. Go anywhere you can find groups of dogs and try to get to know a breed if that's what you're interested in adopting.

One other thing, Dr. Becker. I think we've only had two rescues returned to us, one because the owner passed away, and the other because the owner became too ill to take care of the dog. We have a huge placement success rate, and I think it's because of our vetting process. So, learn, learn, learn, that's my advice."
