

The Joy and Meaning a Senior Dog Can Bring Into Your Life

Our newest Game Changers, Kristen Peralta and her husband Marc of Vintage Pet Rescue, do what many people can't or won't do: care for dogs who have aged gracefully and now need to live out their days in comfort. Kristen wants to spread the word about the specialness of senior animals.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Kristen Peralta and her husband Marc run Vintage Pet Rescue in Rhode Island, caring dogs who have aged gracefully and need to live out their days in comfort
- Nominated for a Healthy Pets Game Changer Award by Dave M., Kristen and Vintage Pet Rescue took in 255 senior hospice special needs dogs in 2022, finding homes for about 220 of them
- Vintage Pet Rescue relies on its small network of dedicated volunteers who are knowledgeable about the unique needs of senior pets
- Vintage Pet Rescue also started a community outreach program in 2022, visiting housing authorities in Rhode Island to help low-income seniors who have pets
- If you'd like to donate, get involved or check out the animals available for fostering and adopting, you can learn more at VintagePetRescue.org

It takes a special person to open their heart and home to a senior pet, and Kristen Peralta is that person — and then some. She and her husband Marc run Vintage Pet Rescue in Rhode Island, caring for those dogs who have aged gracefully and need to live out their days in comfort and surrounded by compassion.

Nominated for a Healthy Pets Game Changer Award by Dave M., Kristen says her journey to helping senior pets "evolved very organically":

"I met my husband in Los Angeles. He was working for Best Friend's Animal Society, and I was volunteering for a rescue group. We met and we ended up taking home a little white hospice dog that was at the shelter, and we just didn't want to see her in the shelter. We thought we would take her home and have her for a few months and spoil her.

We named her Rue McClanahan, and she actually ended up living in our home with us for about a year and a half before she passed away. When she did pass away ... we adopted another senior dog in her memory and it kind of just spiraled from there."

Hundreds of Hospice Special Needs Dogs Saved

After moving to Rhode Island in 2017, Kristen's journey quickly expanded from taking in senior dogs no one else wanted to running a nonprofit rescue organization helping hundreds of older dogs each year:

"I honestly thought we'd have 10, 20 dogs every year coming through our doors and we'd be a sanctuary. They would stay with us until they passed away. Well, the need for senior rescues is much, much higher than I anticipated. Just last year we actually took in 255 senior hospice special needs dogs.

Found homes for about 220 of those. Some are still in foster care or with forever fosters. It's kind of exploded. It's definitely not what I anticipated when we started this five years ago, but we're changing a lot of lives and touching a lot of people and that's really special."

Vintage Pet Rescue has a small network of dedicated volunteers who are knowledgeable about the unique needs of senior pets. Kristen and Marc have a dedicated rescue room in their home where up to 35 dogs can roam cage-free.

"Most of the dogs do come straight to our home. They live here, we'll get them vetted, we'll get to know them, we'll write their bio, and then we'll have people who are interested in fostering or adopting come here to get them.

We will take some dogs from other states, and we do have some great fosters in other states that will just keep the dogs with them in the state that they're in and we work with them that way ... we made a great network."

Community Outreach Program Saves Even More Senior Pets

Vintage Pet Rescue also started a community outreach program in 2022. They visit housing authorities in Rhode Island to help low-income seniors who have pets. They bring in supplies, groomers and vet techs to the buildings, bringing resources to the pet owners, many of whom don't drive.

"We're bringing the resources and the supplies they need directly to them. Then if they do need additional vetting, we actually pay for that. We'll cover that financially. We started it last year and this year we're really expanding it to help as many seniors with pet services that we can," Kristen says.

She's also made connections with local shelters and rescue organizations. In addition to taking in older dogs that wouldn't do well in a shelter environment, she works with area rescues and shelters to share supplies and ideas.

Vintage Pet Rescue receives a lot of dogs from owners who are going into a nursing home or facing an illness and can no longer care for their pet. However, they try to keep previous owners involved in their pet's new life:

"We're not like other rescues where once a dog is surrendered, that's it, there's no more communication ... We have had probably about 10 or 12 different situations where the owners have actually come to visit their animals here, or will stay in touch with the adopter or the foster to get updates.

We will send updates and pictures if they want. Sometimes it's too hard for them and they'll tell us that, and we understand, but we do have that as an option to keep them involved in their pet's life if they want."

Finding Joy Even in the Face of Heartache

Working with older animals is emotionally and mentally draining, but Kristen does her best to keep things positive. "We deal with a lot of illness, a lot of death, a lot of different things that are tough," she says.

"We just keep doing what we can to keep a positive outlook. Sometimes I need to really give myself a kick in the butt when I'm walking around saying, 'Oh my gosh, everyone's sick, everyone's dying.'"

But that's what we do. We take in hospice dogs. We're not going to have them for 10 or 14 years. We might only have them for a few weeks, and we just have to focus on making those few weeks the best that they have."

Consider Adopting a Senior Pet

If you'd like to donate, get involved or check out the animals available for fostering and adopting, you can learn more at VintagePetRescue.org.¹ They're also on social media. Kristen says:

"On Instagram it's @Vintage_Pet_Rescue. On Facebook, if you just search for Vintage Pet Rescue. We're always posting super, super cute photos, funny photos. We try to keep it very positive even though we're dealing with a lot of heartache ..."

We want people to actually want to take in a senior dog and try this out. Also, our website is VintagePetRescue.org, and on there you can see all our adoptable dogs and there's a way to contact us on there through email and our frequently asked questions."

Kristen also wants to spread the word about how much joy and meaning senior dogs can bring into your life. So if you're considering adopting a pet, consider a senior:

"My entire purpose of Vintage Pet Rescue and everything we're doing is really promoting senior dogs. I'll say this, taking on a senior dog or a hospice dog or a paralyzed dog, it is not for everyone, but I would really encourage everyone to think about it."

If they're thinking about adding a new animal to their household, maybe they don't want a puppy and they're thinking adults, well maybe think about that 12- or 13- or 14-year-old ... it's very special to be part of the last chapter of their life. I would love for people to really think about it and consider a senior."

Sources and References

¹ [Vintage Pet Rescue](http://VintagePetRescue.org)
