

11th-Hour Rescue Saving Lives in High-Kill State

The third highest state in the country for euthanasia of homeless pets, many of its shelters don't even have rescue programs. Our latest Game Changer, Molly Goldston, has made it her mission to work with shelters to save as many animals as she can once they are placed on euthanasia lists.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Today's Pet Game Changer is Molly Goldston, founder of Saving Grace, a nonprofit organization in North Carolina that rescues dogs on euthanasia lists across the state and pulls out all the stops to get them ready for adoption
- Molly began working in animal sheltering right out of college, and found a huge need for rescue services in her own backyard and throughout her county and state; many of the shelters in NC, especially in rural areas, can't provide veterinary or adoption services
- Saving Grace rescues, rehabs, and rehomes about 4,000 dogs a year, and depends on volunteers, fosters, and individual donations to save pets from euthanasia and prepare them for adoption

Today my guest is Molly Goldston, who was nominated for a Game Changer award by Carson G. Molly is the founder of Saving Grace, a nonprofit rescue organization in North Carolina established in 2004 to help animals most in need across the state find permanent, loving homes where they will be treated as family members for the rest of their lives.

Molly Saw a Need and Stepped Up in a Big Way

Molly explains that she began working in animal sheltering about 20 years ago, right out of college, and immediately recognized a huge need to help homeless animals in her area of Wake County.

"I started Saving Grace at my local family farm, which makes for a unique adoption experience," she says.

"Shelters are often just chain link and concrete, so the farm is a more welcoming experience for both the animals and the people who visit. The dogs spend time outside together, behaving in more natural ways than they do in shelters."

Molly explains that each dog also has a crate, and they go in and out of their crates throughout the day for meals, medication, rest time, etc.

"But it's not a home, it's still a shelter," Molly points out. "It's a bridge between being homeless and finding a forever family. People can meet the dogs in our outdoor spaces, and they remain with us until they're adopted."

As soon as one of our dogs finds a home, we bring in another who's on the euthanasia list at a shelter somewhere in the state. We're doing about 4,000 adoptions a year now, so we're very busy. During COVID we did about 4,500 adoptions a year."

Rescue, Rehab, Rehome, Repeat

Saving Grace works closely with about 12 shelters, several of which don't even have adoption programs. No vaccines are given, nor are pets spayed/neutered. There's very little available to the animals in those facilities. According to Molly, NC is the third highest state in the country for euthanasia of homeless pets.

She visits the shelters and chooses dogs who seem to be good candidates for Saving Grace, and for eventually finding forever homes. Sadly, she must leave a lot of animals behind, but she pulls out all the stops to get the ones she rescues ready for adoption.

During the COVID shutdowns when veterinary clinics weren't open, Molly was able to call on her great relationship with the College of Veterinary Medicine at NC State University to help her quickly set up a spay/neuter facility and ultimately, hire a full-time veterinarian to do the procedures.

Saving Grace was able to continue operating during COVID, and more recently, the spay/neuter set-up allows Molly and her team move animals more quickly from shelters into new homes, making it possible to help a greater number of homeless pets.

"We have incredible volunteers," says Molly. "It's really the only reason Saving Grace is what it is and works every day. And we also have a huge foster program, so we have about 500 volunteers in total."

We rescue a lot of moms with puppies, and since it takes a while for the pups to be ready for adoption, and since they're at increased risk for disease during the vaccination period, they all go to foster homes for about a month, typically."

Molly is doing such important work and having a huge effect in her community and across the state. In a decade or so, she'll be able to visibly see the impact she's had in terms of disease reduction in pets, as well as population control.

Shelter Pets Are Great Pets. Pass It On!

As I do with all the Game Changers I have the honor of meeting, I asked Molly what she loves most about her work.

"I think seeing how happy people are when they adopt," she replies. "We've been doing this long enough now that about every week I get a letter letting me know that a dog we rehomed has passed away."

And of course, it's really sad, but I always think about the great life those dogs had, and that they lived and died with someone who loved them instead of alone in a shelter. And the people are so wonderful. They often make a gift to us in the pet's name, or they bring all their unused pet supplies to us so they can help other animals."

Molly hopes that the people who adopt dogs from Saving Grace go on to help show their families, friends and neighbors just how great shelter pets can be.

"We try to do a really great job with each adoption, not just for the animals and their new families, but also to promote the adoption process and encourage people to adopt," she says.

*"Our website is **Saving Grace** and you can find all our information right there. You can also find us on **Instagram** and **Facebook**. We're funded solely by donations, and every donation helps provide care to our animals."*

According to Molly, about 40% of adult dogs in the Wake County area are heartworm positive, which presents a huge challenge. They treat each dog who comes in with heartworm, and it costs around \$1,000 per dog, so every donation, no matter how small, makes a difference. There's an Amazon wish list on their website as well. Finally, I asked Molly what one thing she would like to share with the world.

"Check out the volunteer opportunities in your area and see where the needs are," she replies, "because just a couple hours away, things can be very, very different. Also, before getting an animal, visit the rescue or shelter or breeder and find out how the pet has been cared for."
