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# GARD benefits from Pooler block party

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One block party was particularly happy to be there.

By [Linda Sickler](#)

Joy Bohannon works harder now than she ever has in her life, but she's saved countless lives.

Bohannon founded Georgia Animal Rescue and Defense because of the need for a no-kill shelter in this area. "The other shelters are so over-populated, they have to put dogs to sleep when there's not enough room," she said.

"We needed something different in this area," Bohannon said. "I have contacts with shelters up north where they don't have overpopulation issues because of strict spay and neuter laws. I decided do something."

In addition to the shelter, which is located at 100 Dichroic Dragon Drive. in Pembroke, GARD has foster families that take care of pets until they are adopted. "We have very caring people on our board," Bohannon said.

Not one animal is ever killed at GARD. "I'm talking right now with another rescue that is going take 15 dogs," Bohannon said. "And, of course, we do a lot of great adoptions around here."

Taking care of all those animals is

expensive. The only funding GARD receives is through adoption fees and fundraisers.

"Last year alone, we spent \$35,000 on veterinary care," Bohannon said. "That's where most of our money goes. We're always doing fundraisers here."

"We do pet portraits every year in Forsyth Park. With spring coming up, we have a lot of good things lined up."

On March 6, a block party was held in Pooler to benefit GARD. Sponsored jointly by H&R Block, Bella Salon & Spa and GARD, it featured vendors, displays, food, live entertainment

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and fun for people and pets alike.

"Five years ago, our regional manager said he wanted us to show that we are part of the community, and he wanted an action plan by the end of that week," said Sherri Moore of H&R Block. "We threw together a block party. We had so much fun, we decided we were going to do it the next year, and it turned into an annual event that's gotten bigger and bigger."

Not only is the block party a big event that requires lots of planning, it happens at the height of tax season. "I have a super team, a great team that helps," Moore said. "Everyone helps take a little of the edge off."

This year's event featured 30 booths, plus a bounce house and slide for the kids. There also was live entertainment, including performances by square dancers and students from A Class Act Dance Center.

GARD was there, too, with dogs available for adoption and a low-cost rabies clinic that also offered microchipping, ear cleaning and nail clipping also available. There also were best-dressed dog contests, a cutest dog trick contest and dog/owner races.

"The block party has benefitted GARD for the past three years," Moore said. "Having the rabies clinic benefitted so many people, and we're really happy about that. I had a lot of people tell me they appreciated it because there's not a lot they can do with their pets."

The weather couldn't have been cooperative, Moore said. "We do it the first Saturday in March every year and try to work around St. Patrick's Day, she said. "We're in God's hands when comes to the weather."

The booth fees and sale of food all benefitted GARD. Moore herself is an animal lover. "I have six dogs and four cats," she said.

Sharon Lucas is the owner Bella Salon & Spa, which co-sponsored the event. She joined in the fun three years ago when she opened her business.

"I think it went great," Lucas said. "Each year it's gotten bigger and better. We picked up some new clients and did really well."

Lucas is already looking ahead. "We'll be doing it again next year," she said. "We hope we'll have even more people."

The money raised at the block party is greatly appreciated. "We get no funding from the state or any other type of funding," Bohannon said. "We raise every penny. A lot comes out of our pockets. When you get involved with animals, there's always something that needs to be done."

Such as the rescued boxer mix that wags his tail so hard, it bleeds. "They're going to have to dock his tail next week," Bohannon said. "Then he'll be adoptable."

Animals receive treatment for every ailment they have when they come in. "Heartworm treatments are constant," Bohannon said.

Adoption fees vary and usually run from \$150 to \$180. The fee covers the spay/neuter surgery, heartworm test, rabies and distemper/parvo shots and even 30 days of pet health insurance to cover any vet visits for the first month.

There's never a lack of animals to rescue. "We pull from high-kill shelters," Bohannon said. "People bring them in and surrender them when they can no longer keep them. We have people who call us when they need dog food or cat food, and if we have extra, we're willing to share."

"If we had a pet food bank in this area, it would be great," she said. "We're not in a position to do it, but if someone in the area had an 'in' with the pet food companies, that would be fantastic."

GARD's most dramatic rescue came when it took 90 puppies and dogs confiscated from an Atlanta puppy mill. "They were in horrendous condition," Bohannon said. "Just getting them stabilized cost \$6,000, and that didn't include the spays and neuters. It really killed our budget, but we did get them adopted out."

The turnaround was dramatic. "Within a couple of weeks, they were just like any other dogs -- running, playing and happy," Bohannon said.

"We're down to 10 from the original 90," she said. "We were really kind of full, but what are you going to do? You can't say no."

Rescuing animals can take an emotional toll. "I go through some points where it gets really

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depressing," Bohannon said. "It seems like when it's bad, it gets worse. But you have to focus on what's good, remember the triumphs we do have. It would be a lot easier to just give up, but who's going to take care of all the babies?"

"And they are my babies," she said. "I put in 10 to 12 hours a day, and I'm supposed to be retired, but when we save them, it's fantastic."

"I can see this is something I want to do forever. I want to be able to keep it going even after I'm gone. These dogs will have a place to go."

Bohannon is so determined to give every dog a home, she keeps some of those that are harder to place. "Some of my dogs have psychological problems, or have to have long-term treatments," she said. "If I could find perfect homes, I would probably let a couple of them go, but I highly doubt there is a perfect home for them."

For example, Bohannon has a Chihuahua whose owner died in Iraq. "He had really bonded with his dad," she said. "He's doing really well with us, but anyone else, he'd bite them in a minute. He'll remain with me forever."

Fortunately, Bohannon's husband, Philip Rutherford, also is an animal lover. "It doesn't matter what kind, we love them all," she said.

"I grew up with animals and my parents were animal lovers," Bohannon said. "My mother is 'the cat lady.' She and my sister have trapped about 200 feral cats. They trap them, spay and release them, which cuts down on the population."

The facts about pet overpopulation are startling and heartbreaking. Only one in 10 dogs born gets a home, and only one in 12 cats does. Eight hundred animals are euthanized every hour in the United States today.

If Bohannon could change the world, there's one thing she'd do. "People have got to spay and neuter their pets," she said. "It would cut down on all those poor animals dying. There's just no reason for it."

GARD board member Tammy Williams adopted a rescue dog four years ago. "That led me to fostering and volunteering for animal rescue groups," she said.

A friend told Williams about GARD. "Joy was willing to take two strays I picked up," she said. "She got them placed in wonderful homes."

A professional photographer, Williams does some photography for GARD and also volunteers to help with adoptions. "If you have a dog that's really hard to place, sometimes all it takes is a really beautiful picture," she said.

"Joy goes the extra mile to get the dogs proper medical treatment and find special homes for them," Williams said. "We hear really wonderful things from people about Joy. GARD is a wonderful organization."

Board member Victor Tetreault adopted a dog from the shelter and was so impressed, he became a volunteer. His wife, Jet, also is on the board. "I do all the legal work for them and I've helped with fundraising," he said.

"Animal rescue is a fun thing, but it also can be hard and very depressing. We had one dog that was used as breeder even though it had something wrong with its brain and kept falling over."

"But Joy got it adopted out," he said. "She'll hang on to some dogs forever and darned if she doesn't find them homes. There was a three-legged boxer, and she found it a wonderful home. I couldn't believe it."

Board member Laura Lightle set up GARD's web site. "I live near the shelter, in Ellabell, she said. "Out here in the country, people tend to just dump dogs off."

Lightle would call Bohannon when she had strays. "She'd come get them and find them homes," Lightle said.

"I offered to redo the web site. I realized she didn't have all the dogs at her shelter posted, and I offered to go take pictures of the dogs."

Two years later, Lightle is still volunteering. "It's a rapidly growing organization, and we're constantly making improvements," she said. "There've been growing pains, but we're getting there."

One of the things Lightle finds sad is that not every animal can be saved. "It's depressing when we rescue a sick dog and can't save it, or a puppy gets sick and dies," she said.

"But we've gotten pages and pages and pages of e-mails from people who have adopted

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dogs and are so happy with them," Lightle said. "To see that dog that came to the shelter skinny, shaking, shivering, a day away from being euthanized, and now you know it's sleeping in somebody's bed is very rewarding."

Lightle has five dogs of her own, all of them rescued. "Joy's done a good job," she said. "We need more dedicated long-term volunteers to keep things going and help us keep save more and more dogs."

"Her long-term goal is to get a low-cost spay-neuter clinic," Lightle said. "People don't realize how many pets are getting killed. If you buy a dog, that means there's going be a dog that dies."

On the web

For more information about adopting a pet, volunteering or making a donation, to to [gardonline.org](http://gardonline.org).

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