



NEW ROUTE TO ADOPTION

BY KAREN E. LANGE

ALL OF THE PUPPIES LOADED onto the tractor-trailer in Bowling Green were headed on journeys, leaving Kentucky to find new homes. The April transport would take them from the South, where puppies are plentiful, to rescues in the Northeast, where higher spay/neuter rates prevail. Some were going to Connecticut. Others to New York. Many were bound for Pennsylvania. Among them: twenty-one puppies sent to a Philadelphia rescue. It was an experiment. They would be delivered to a store north of the city. Then for the first time, instead of selling breeder puppies, Pets Plus Natural of Jenkintown would offer shelter dogs for adoption.

Across the United States, 59 cities and counties have banned pet store sales of commercially bred puppies, hoping to shut down puppy mills—businesses that neglect and abuse animals. Individual stores may be an even more powerful force for change. A year ago, John Moyer of the HSUS Stop Puppy Mills Campaign had helped convert five stores to the new business model when he approached the owners of Pets Plus Natural, which has 10 locations around

Philadelphia. Willing to take a chance with their Jenkintown store, they hold a grand reopening timed to the arrival of the Kentucky puppies.

There are shepherd-collie mixes, terriers, rottweiler-boxers and Australian cattle dogs: litters brought to the Bowling Green/Warren County Humane Society by owners who failed to spay their dogs, puppies collected from overcrowded shelters and animals found abandoned on the roadside.

On the day of the adoption event, a sign outside and Facebook announcements bring scores of customers through the door. Within hours, Mark Arabia, one of the chain's owners, declares the trial a success and starts thinking about doing adoptions in other stores: "People came in and said that now they are going to shop here—they want to support us. ... As many puppies as we can save, as many as they can get us, that's what we can [take]."

KENTUCKY DEPARTURE

Bearing dogs in their arms and over their shoulders, volunteers with the Bowling Green/Warren County Humane Society load a truck that will carry the 21 puppies bound for Philadelphia on the first leg of their journey (opposite). The Bowling Green shelter takes in as many as 40 to 50 puppies a week, says Deana Wehr, rescue and transport manager, enough to fill the tractor-trailer every month.

PENNSYLVANIA ARRIVAL

Minnie and Malcolm (above right) are met by an Operation Ava volunteer in Center Valley, Pennsylvania, where the Bowling Green truck makes a rendezvous with around 20 rescue groups. Besides the two terriers, Operation Ava volunteers pick up the 21 puppies. At the group's Philadelphia shelter, the dogs receive veterinary exams and are quarantined for two weeks. Then one Saturday they are driven to the Pets Plus store.

ADOPTION EVENT

Once at Pets Plus, some of the puppies are adopted within hours. The Irwin family (right) is looking for a big dog—one who will ride in the back seat of their car, unlike the small Westie and Yorkie and poodle who typically crowd the front. They are drawn at once to a litter of rottweiler-boxers and choose the largest. "Dude, you are so laid-back," says mother Christina Irwin. "This is exactly the kind of personality we need."



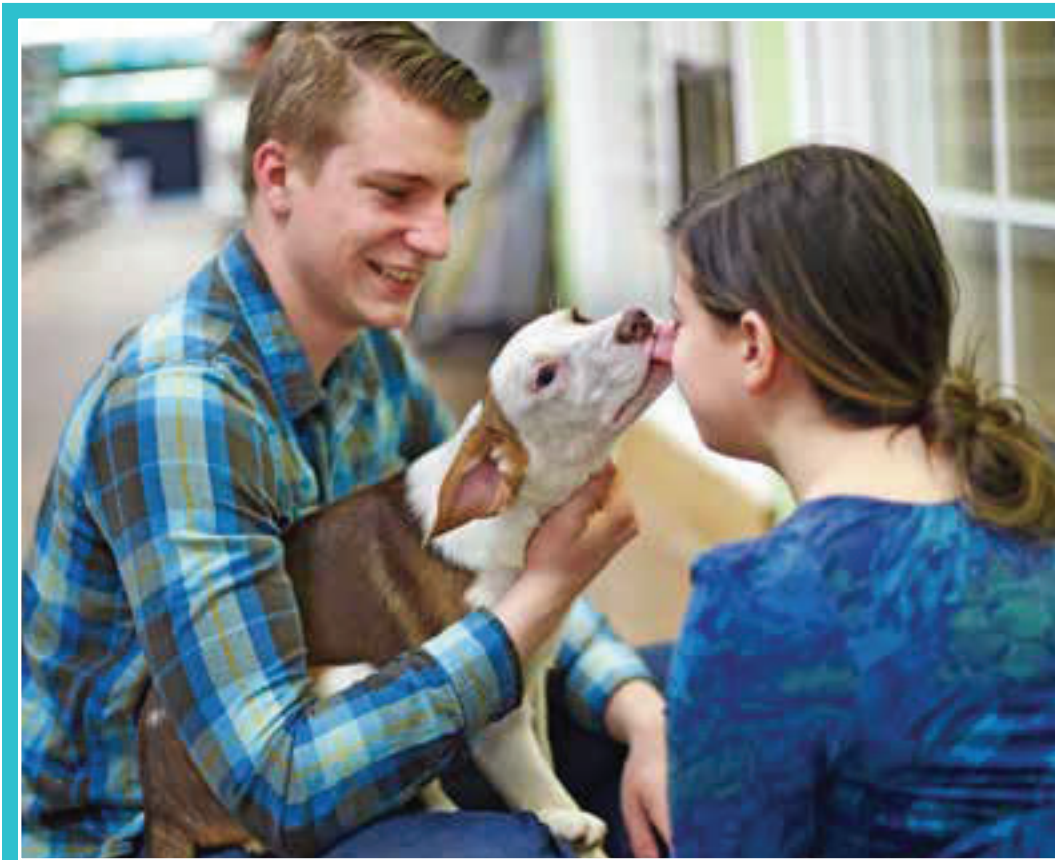
Long Road Home

- Bowling Green, KY
- Center Valley, PA
- Philadelphia, PA



BEFORE THE DAY ENDS, six of the puppies are adopted. Within two weeks, all find homes. In four and a half months, the Jenkintown store adopts out 133 puppies. (In the past, when it offered dogs for sale at \$1,000 apiece, Pets Plus of Jenkintown sold perhaps three a week.) In late August, Deana Wehr of the Bowling Green shelter emails chain co-owner Bruce Smith, as another truck heads out. "This is the biggest transport ever in my 14 years! ... Thank you all so much for helping save so many lives!" Grateful, Smith and his partners are now planning to convert their nine other stores. They are adopting

out cats and even pet rats as well as dogs, nursing any animals who fall sick during the transport back to health. "We'll see them through and get them homes," says Dawn Bateman, Pets Plus adoption coordinator. "We love what we're doing, all of us do." In addition to the Kentucky transports, Moyer is trying to connect Pets Plus to shelters in rural Pennsylvania and arranging for puppies to be sent, with HSUS assistance, from shelters in West Virginia and South Carolina. With over 1,000 puppies adopted out at Jenkintown and other stores that have converted, the pet store business has entered a new era.



PUPPY TIME!

A puppy woos prospective parents at the newly converted store (left). Ferrying a dog to potential adopters, an Operation Ava volunteer (below, left) gets to snuggle one of the rottweiler-boxer pups. John Moyer (below, right), outreach coordinator for the HSUS Stop Puppy Mills Campaign, hoists a littermate into the crowd that fills an aisle by mid-afternoon. Behind him stands a young woman with the dog she and her brother have chosen (with parental approval): Snoopy.





MAX & HER NEW FAMILY

The Carusos come through the doors as soon as they open: Michael and Carol are searching for a dog for their son, Mike, who has Down syndrome. They immediately find a little terrier mix named Max, who they had already spotted online. Carol picks up the puppy (left), but Mike, clutching a Spider-Man toy, doesn't notice. Then, with his hands guided by his parents, the boy begins to stroke the puppy's fur (above). "Michael, what do you think?" his father asks. "We're going to try to get you a puppy—would you like that?" Wordlessly, the answer comes. Mike looks into his father's eyes and breaks into a huge grin. "That's all I need to see," says his dad. Mike continues to pet Max, renamed Emily, concentrating, a soft smile on his face. Adoption papers signed and \$350 fee paid, the family poses—the first to go home with a puppy (above).