

Unsung Heroes **Group provides new start for racing dogs**

By Jennifer Shapiro-Sacks Special Correspondent

Name: Mary-Ellen Robinson

Residence: West Palm Beach

Birthplace: Hadley, Mass.

Family: Husband, Marshall Robinson

Career: Picture framing and nurse

Organization: Awesome Greyhound Adoptions is a Boynton Beach-based nonprofit, no-kill greyhound adoption group that finds homes for retired racing greyhounds. It also has a Hounds & Heroes program that helps place the dogs as pets, therapy dogs or service dogs with veterans.

How long have you been volunteering there?

Four years.

Why do you volunteer?

We love dogs. We also board dogs here. That's how we met Barbara [Masi, the group's founder], and we adopted our greyhound.

Why did you choose this organization?

That's where we adopted Drew, our greyhound. I think what [Barbara] does is wonderful.

Describe your volunteer role.

When she gets a greyhound off the track, immediately it goes to the veterinarian. We pick it up from the veterinarian, teach it that it doesn't have to run, teach them how to be a dog and give it toys to play with. The first time they hear squeaky toys, it's really heartwarming. We're teaching them to fetch a ball, to run anywhere they want and check them out to see if they would make good service dogs. If so, they are put with a trainer to help disabled veterans. The ones that are not trainable, we find homes for. We make sure they are good to be a pet, expose them to different things and give them as much exposure as possible.

What are your goals when you volunteer?

To see if that dog can be a service dog. That is our primary thing.

What challenges have you faced?

Some dogs are a little aggressive. When they first come off the track, they are pretty food aggressive. They've never had treats, so it's something out of the ordinary for them, so they might try to get treats from other dogs.

What does your organization need?

The number one thing is donations. Everything is volunteer, [and] training and food cost money. We need people to donate monetarily, or if they want to volunteer to be a foster parent, we're looking for foster parents and permanent homes for the ones that are not going into service.

Are any special events coming up?

There is a quilt raffle going on until July 5, handmade by one of the trainers. Raffle tickets are available on the website. There is an Independence Day celebration on July 4 at the Palm Beach Kennel Club from noon-2 p.m. and the On Track for Greyhound Adoption Walk on Aug. 29 at the Palm Beach Kennel Club from noon-2 p.m.

Is there a moment that stands out that made you think, "This is why I volunteer?"

Watching the veterans getting awarded their dogs, there is absolutely nothing like it. There's not a dry eye in the whole place.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

It's the most rewarding job I think that we've ever had. It's not a job; it's a lot of fun. If anyone is thinking about adopting a greyhound, I advise them to foster a greyhound first. They are the most docile, wonderful dogs in the world. They like to run and need to for 15 minutes a day, and the rest of the time they are on the couch or bed. They sleep a lot.

For more information, visit Awesomegreyhoundadoptions.org or call 561-737-1941.

If you know a Palm Beach County resident who deserves recognition for volunteer work, email the information to tan90210@aol.com. Nominations should include volunteer's name, city of residence, a contact name and phone number, and a brief description of why this person deserves special recognition.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Mary-Ellen Robinson has volunteered with Awesome Greyhound Adoptions for four years.