



People Power

BY JENNIFER ROTHACKER

Bobbie Thompson

Starting over: Nearly 25 years ago, Bobbie Thompson read an article in the Milledgeville, Ga., newspaper about the need for volunteers at the beleaguered local humane society. Thompson had recently quit her job at a hospital, where she worked first as a nurse and then in the pharmacy, to spend more time with her husband. An animal lover, Thompson signed on as a volunteer. In the summer of 1983, she helped make the decision to dissolve the local humane society and became a founder of the new Animal Rescue Foundation Inc. (ARF). Decades later, as president and board chairman of ARF, she still works for the organization without pay.

A roof over their heads: Between 1983 and 1995, ARF worked out of the Baldwin County animal control facility. Then, for more than a year, the organization was shelter-less and resorted to using only foster homes until a trailer was donated in 1996. ARF operated out of the trailer until a move to its current facility three years ago; the building can house up to 40 cats and will soon be able to accommodate 30 dogs after the addition of a 12-dog run. Disinfection techniques have improved, and the shelter is adding a second isolation room.

Hard to quit: In her quarter century at ARF, Thompson has been a Jane of all trades. "Growing up with the organization, I have done every aspect of what you would do working at a shelter—cleaning cages, walking the dogs, socializing the animals, fundraising, grant writing, etc.—and any aspect of it is a lot of work," Thompson says. "It's something I feel like I was supposed to do. For some of us, it's hard to quit." Maybe Thompson is compensating for a deprived childhood: her mom didn't like pets, so she didn't have one until she got married.

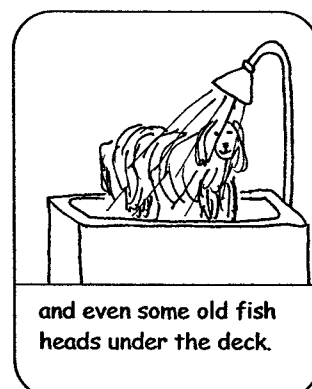
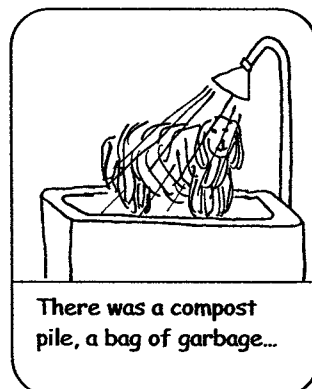
The community: Smack in the center of Georgia, Milledgeville was the state capital before the Civil War. Today, Baldwin County is home to only about 45,000; the surrounding five counties are even smaller. It's about a 1 1/2-hour drive from

Atlanta. Despite that isolation, its residents—many of whom work for the state or the local colleges—are willing to think progressively. And Thompson has seized upon that. Twenty years ago, cost of treatment and length of recovery time prevented the shelter from treating as many dogs as it does now for heartworm disease. "But now people in the community are seeing that animals at shelters really are quality animals," she says, and they are supporting ARF's desire to treat them all. And most notably, ARF recently received a grant that enables the organization to offer clicker training for shelter dogs and pets of community members.

Beyond Milledgeville: As a former board member of the Humane Association of Georgia (HAGA), Thompson has helped lead several state initiatives, including a successful seven-year effort to persuade the state to offer a spay/neuter license plate.

Disaster relief is also important to Thompson. "People don't take disasters seriously enough," Thompson says. "It's an 'it-will-never-happen-to-me' syndrome." Thompson is HAGA's first animals-in-disaster coordinator. She wrote HAGA's state disaster plan and assisted with several training workshops across the state. Partly because of these efforts, Georgia now has at least 10 pet-friendly emergency shelters.

Dog Park



By J & J Hubal