

People Power

BY PEPPER BALLARD

Latichia Duffy

Right at home: Latichia Duffy is no stranger to overwhelming situations. For seven years, the Osceola, Mo., animal control officer has used minimal funds to operate a tiny shelter in an area surrounded by puppy mills.

Although she's accustomed to finding new homes for the discarded dogs of mass-breeding operations nearly as quickly as they're dropped off at her facility, Duffy has room for only a dozen at a time. So when she learned a few months ago that 25 dogs in St. Clair County were in need of immediate rescue, she knew she'd have to call in reinforcements. "My goal in the beginning was to save as many as I could," Duffy says. "I never dreamed we would save them all."

■ **There was no time to spare:** One of the dogs' owners, a cancer patient, was being refused hospice care until the animals were removed. Because euthanasia services at a local veterinarian's office cost more than the couple could afford, a neighbor was planning to shoot the dogs.

■ **Friends lend a paw:** After a flurry of phone calls and e-mails, Duffy received an offer of assistance from The Humane Society of the United States' (HSUS) Kansas state director, Mary Prewitt. By the time Prewitt arrived at the Osceola shelter, Duffy had also tapped into "a whole rescue network" of local animal protection organizations, says Prewitt. Soon enough, a plan was hatched to save the original 25 animals plus 20 more dogs who had recently landed in Duffy's care. A St. Louis rescue would take two corgis, and a Kansas City group would take five puppies and two adults. The rest would go with HSUS teams to Main Line Animal Rescue in Pennsylvania.

"Latichia's the one who got this ball rolling," says Scotlund Haisley, senior director of emergency services for The HSUS. "She wasn't too proud to call out for help.



As Osceola's lone animal control officer, she's doing the best she can on a budget of \$10,000, but can barely keep up with the 400 to 600 dogs she cares for annually."

■ **Lemons to lemonade:** As a city animal control officer, Duffy has no jurisdiction over the nearby counties that host mass-breeding facilities. But for the sake of the dogs, she's managed to become friendly enough with local operators that they now bring her their unwanted animals—those who can no longer breed or who are aggressive toward other dogs. The alternative could be much worse: Some homeless dogs in the region may have ended up at auction sales or shot or drowned in the past, says Duffy.

With Duffy on their side, the dogs now meet better fates. Of the dozens of parasite-infested and pregnant animals rescued this spring, one who'd suffered a shattered leg is now a poster child for Forever Friends' humane education and fundraising initiatives. Another who'd been initially terrified found his voice on the way to Main Line Animal Rescue—and then wouldn't stop barking about it. When HSUS director of field operations Jeff Eyre helped load animals onto The HSUS's 75-foot trailer in Missouri, some frolicked in the grass while others lifted their paws

to test the turf—typical behavior for dogs who've never set foot on solid earth.

Duffy's quick thinking and compassion brought about a new day for these traumatized animals, but in typically humble fashion, she credits others for the success of the operation: "The HSUS stepped up and did something I didn't even think was possible."

Did You Miss Out on Expo?

If you weren't one of the lucky dogs who made it to Orlando in May for Animal Care Expo 2008, you can still benefit from some of the workshops. Recognizing that travel and training budgets are skimpy at many agencies, The Humane Society of the United States is making several key tracks available for viewing online. You can have your own mini-Expo within the comfort of your shelter!

Visit animalsheltering.org/expo to download the workshops and tap into the magic!