

# R.S.V.P. Animal Rescue

*Local group helps neglected dogs*



**Luna ready to pull.**

**By CATHY MEINHOLD**

Luna is participating in the Lug Nuts weight pull event, preparing to pit her strength against that of dozens of other dogs of various sizes. She is a bit nervous as she is fit into her harness, which is strapped to a sled, but with just a little encouragement, she eagerly pulls more than her own body weight briskly down the course. She and her owner, Lillian, are so proud, and Luna jumps and wiggles in excitement. Of course, her body weight is about the same as a large bag of sugar, but this does not dull her enthusiasm, or her chances of winning, since the winner is determined by percentage of body weight pulled. Tiny Luna has a chance at victory!

The little Jack Russell Terrier is a rescue dog. Like so many others, she has a sad tale of abuse and abandonment. However, with the help of R.S.V.P. (Responsible Solutions for Valued Pets) she has finally found a happy forever home and has come out of her shell to become a loving member of her family. She attended the Lug Nuts fundraiser event to support R.S.V.P. in their mission and for a little fun and exercise.

R.S.V.P. is a nonprofit organization dedicated to reducing the euthanasia rate among shelter dogs on Long Island's east end. They work with dogs that are considered 'unadoptable' due to behavior issues or because their breed is considered undesirable, such as the much-maligned Pit Bull Terrier. Volunteers and behavior specialists like Kathleen Gallina of Zen Dog, work with the animals and with prospective families to retrain the dogs and educate the adopters, ensuring the best possible placement for each animal. Since they began their work, the euthanasia rate at the Riverhead Shelter has dropped to 6 percent.

Along with their work at the shelters, R.S.V.P. has an active outreach program aimed at educating and assisting owners, ultimately helping pets to stay in the homes they already have. Samantha Mullen is a volunteer who targets the Mastic area. She is alerted to situations of dog neglect. She then approaches the owners, offering help and guidance. "If someone knows a dog that needs us they call. We go, knock on the door, tell them we'd like to help," said Mullen. "Most of the time, people just don't

know what to do. They got a cute puppy and now that it's big, they can't handle it. We teach them how. Most of the dogs stay with their owners, that's what we want." R.S.V.P. volunteers are non-judgmental, and want only the best for the animals. They will help provide doghouses, food, and medical care to families with animals in need.

All this positive work for the dogs is costly and the Lug Nuts event, in conjunction with Zen Dog, is a fundraiser for the organization. A steady stream of dogs, large and small, came through the barn, donated for the day by L&L Horse Farm, to compete. Raffles and snacks were offered as well. On hand to represent their breed were Wrinkles and Cinnamon, red-nosed American Pit Bull Terriers who work as service dogs. Wrinkles has a special bond with her owner, Joe Caufield. Caufield is severely diabetic and Wrinkles has an uncanny talent for knowing when his blood sugar becomes dangerously low, and alerting him. "Three weeks ago I had a heart attack and a sugar attack at the same time," said Caufield. "She alerted the people in the house. That's not even what she was taught, she learned that on her own."

At the end of the day, first prize went to Max, an American Bulldog. The large turnout means R.S.V.P. will be able to continue its valuable work. However, there is never enough money to go around and the organization is always in need of donations of cash, dog food, bedding, dog houses, straw, toys and large open spaces to hold events. R.S.V.P. is also always looking for loving foster homes for needy pets. "Sometimes, people can't take care of an animal full time, but maybe they can foster a dog for a few months while we find a permanent home," Mullen said. And of course, loving adoptive homes are desperately needed for these dogs. Contact R.S.V.P. at 219-8529 or visit their Web site at [www.rsvpinc.org](http://www.rsvpinc.org) if you would like to volunteer, foster, adopt or donate, if you own a dog and need help or if you know of a dog in a bad situation. No pet should be left alone, unloved and unwanted. ■



**Brooke and her rescue dog, Cha-Cha, on the Agility Course.**

ADV/MEINHOLD