

Aussie Rescue Helping good dogs find good homes

Photo by RaMar Orgeron

When David and Cyndi Cunico brought two Australian Shepherd puppies into their home they didn't know how much their lives would change.

They didn't know much about the breed, but they soon learned that the canine brothers, Augie and Austin, were a handful.

"They are stubborn, willful and smart as a whip," said David, control specialist, Control Engineering, Electronic Systems.

Aussies, like Border Collies, are renowned for their intelligence and high energy, a volatile combination that can be a mixed blessing.

Because they're so smart they can figure out ways to control their situations. For example, when Augie and Austin wanted to make unauthorized visits inside the house, they learned how to open the latch on their doggie door. They also are observant dogs, closely watching their humans and anticipating events. They quickly learned the Cunico's routine and began thwarting their efforts to leave for work.

"Like all dogs, they love to be with their humans. Where ever we go, they want to go — I call them my Velcro dogs," Cyndi said.

As David and Cyndi found out more about Australian Shepherds, they discovered the need for rescue work.

"People get these dogs and then realize they are a challenge. They need lots of attention, exercise and training. Some people are willing to devote the time and effort to their dogs, others aren't," David said.

Unfortunately, too many Aussies end up in temporary shelters or at the pound, where the clock is always ticking. So David and Cyndi decided to help.

That was three years ago. Since then their permanent dog population



From left, Cyndi and David Cunico, control specialist, Control Engineering, Electronic Systems, with Augie, one of their five Aussies.

has grown to five males, with the addition of rescued Aussies Alex, Stormy and Kandoo. They've fostered and found homes for scores of Aussies, learned a library of information about rescue work, and recently established a small rescue organization Aussielads Aussie Rescue.

Cyndi keeps scrupulous files on every dog. The dog's background, personality, health, and other information are carefully recorded. Each dog gets a name tag. Each dog gets shots and is spayed or neutered. Best of all, they all get the attention they crave.

They go places with Cyndi and David, so they can get used to riding

in a car. Cyndi and David's friends and family meet the incoming Aussies to see how they do with strangers and how they behave around children. They're introduced

Continued on p. TS3.

TEAM SRP

Welcome to the sixth issue of *Team SRP*, a periodic special edition featuring the activities and achievements of employees and their families. If you'd like to contribute a story idea contact RaMar Orgeron, rxorgero/e-mail, Ext. 2622.

“This is the best dog I ever had”

Aussie Rescue ...Continued from p. TS1.

to the resident woofies, to see how they do around other dogs.

“The only thing we don’t know is how they do around cats, because we don’t have any cats,” Cyndi said.

Then they are made available for adoption. The Cunicos thoroughly screen each applicant, to make sure the adoption will be successful.

“Our goal is to match a potential owner’s lifestyle and expectations with this breed of dog. We don’t want to get the phone call all rescuers dread: Come get this dog or I’m taking him to the pound,” David said.

“Also, these dogs have been through enough, we don’t want them to be further traumatized,” Cyndi added.

They work in cooperation with the Arizona Animal Welfare League, Arizona Humane Society, and are members of the Maricopa County Animal Control New Hope program.

(This program allows the Cunicos access to the pre-euthanasia report, enabling them to rescue Aussies scheduled to be put down.)

It’s a 24-7 job that is an endless round of feeding, exercise, veterinarian visits, responding to phone calls and e-mails, screenings and adoptions. Plus, they maintain an active website, www.aussielads.com, that keeps them busy.

Since they opened their home there’s always a crowd. Because of the nature of rescue work, they never know from one day to the next when a new Aussie will come into their lives.

But they stay flexible and make do. And, in fact, they’ve changed their lifestyle as a result of their desire to help the Aussies.

“The hardest part of the job is letting them go,” Cyndi said.

And the best part? “Seeing them go to a good home. Having people call us and say: This is the best dog I’ve ever had,” she said.

Why dogs don’t make good gifts

This holiday season animal welfare groups, rescue organizations and the U.S. Humane Society are working hard to discourage people from buying dogs and other animals to give as gifts.

Perhaps the biggest challenge involves Dalmations, which are featured in the new Disney movie

“102 Dalmations.” Animal welfare organizations estimates show there was a 25 percent increase in the number of Dalmations turned into shelters and rescue groups as a result of Disney’s “101 Dalmations.” Most of the dogs were turned in between six months and a year after the release of the movie in 1996, about the same time the dogs were full-grown, according to rescue workers.

Unfortunately this breed is especially unsuitable for families with small children. Dalmations are very active dogs and require more patience, attention, and exercise than most other dogs. They are also prone to skin and hearing problems.

Similarly, David and Cyndi Cunico expect their Aussielad Aussie Rescue to be overwhelmed after the holiday season with unwanted dogs.

“A dog is a commitment. A dog takes time, effort and money beyond the original purchase. People need to be prepared to be a dog owner and, for the best match-up, they need to choose their own dog. This doesn’t happen when a dog is given as a gift,” David said.

“I would tell anyone considering a dog as a gift: Don’t do it!” added Cyndi.



Photo by RaMar Orgeron

David Cunico with Alex, who was rescued from a bad situation and is now the Aussielads Aussie Rescue “ambassador,” Alex’s image appears on David’s sweatshirt.