

Spotlight on Rescue
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Goldens Not Exempt from Foreclosure Crisis
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You've seen the headlines:

“Mortgage Meltdown Results in Pets Going to Pound” (*CNN*)
“Foreclosures Slam Doors on Family Pets Too” (*USA TODAY*)
“Economic Woes Sweep Pets into Shelters” (*Boston Globe*)
“California: First-of-Its-Kind Animal Abandonment Law Passed” (*ASPCA Action*)

Pets abandoned in foreclosed homes, tied out in yards, turned loose on the streets or even, dumped on shelter doorsteps or in state parks in alarming numbers point to a growing problem that has animal welfare groups and state officials scrambling for ways to respond.

The impact of the current economic crisis on the family pet has become a national disaster and Golden Retrievers are not exempt from the problem. When the GRCA National Rescue Committee asked Golden Retriever Rescue presidents how the economic crisis was impacting their program, comments came pouring in from coast to coast and from north to south.

Lauren Genkinger, President, **Adopt a Golden of Atlanta** replied: *We are seeing many more dogs this year and we are seeing many more seniors being dumped at shelters. We are averaging 2-3 intakes per week which are directly attributable to the economy. Some can't afford food, some can't afford vet care, some have lost their homes and can't afford the pet deposit the apartment owner wants. We also got two abandoned in the backyard and the neighbors finally called after they determined the family wasn't coming back. We had one owner leave a note on a neighbor's door asking them to find a home for the Golden they tied to a tree in the backyard near the water dish. They included his AKC papers.*

Genkinger further relayed this story illustrating the emotional impact on the dogs themselves. *We recently took in two dogs whose family lost their home, she explained. They brought the dogs to a shelter in tears and said the dogs were devoted to each other and couldn't be separated. One was a cockapoo and the other a Golden. A small dog rescue came and got the cockapoo, but the Golden stopped eating and actually cried for hours like he was in pain. The shelter was scared that he was going to die. We went and*

got him and called the small dog rescue. You should have seen the reunion. Well, we have them both and they are doing well.

Candy Ziemer, President, **Arizona Golden Retriever Connection** said: *We have had several dogs turned in because of foreclosures. ..two dogs were living in a house alone. No furniture. No thing. Allegedly the owner was coming over once a day to feed them.... The girl had a very high Valley Fever titer which we are now treating and the boy had to have a mass cell tumor removed. Both are now afraid to go outside for fear of being left there."*

From the Midwest, Robin Sweeney, President, **As Good As Gold Golden Retriever Rescue of Northern Illinois** reported: *We are seeing a significant rise in intake of dogs from families who are being foreclosed, or having to move to smaller homes due to the economy. We took in an 8 year old Golden from a gentleman whose apartment was being foreclosed and the local homeless shelter would not allow him to take his dog.*

And in the East, **Peppertree Rescue (NY)** President Betsy Sommers reported *a return... after ten years!!! Sweet, astonishingly lively old Golden who was placed at 2 years of age. Her owner has had bad economic troubles and is now alone, had to take a second job, and the dog is – truly – too energetic to stay home alone for those very long hours. At least he had a fall-back, said Sommers.*

Abandoned and owner-turned in Goldens have been especially high in areas where foreclosures have been above the national average.

Yankee Golden Retriever Rescue (MA) has seen a steady increase in dogs surrendered both because of the foreclosure crisis and because people can no longer afford to take care of their pets. Calls have been coming in over the last few weeks from some of the larger open admission shelters in New England saying they are full and need to move dogs out to breed rescues to free up space," said YGRR President Barbara LaJeunesse.

Turn-ins with Serious Medical Conditions

Many of the dogs being turned in have serious medical issues that obviously have gone unaddressed for some time.

Gene Fitzpatrick of the **Golden Retriever Rescue Club of Charlotte (NC)** reported: *We have seen a significant increase in the number of dogs being surrendered to us by their owners due to financial issues. A disproportionate number of them have been seniors (8 years+) turned in due to medical issues that owners cannot afford to address and/or continue.*

Eileen McFadden, Adoption Coordinator for **Golden Re-triever Rescue – New Jersey** replied: *What we see being impacted is the veterinary care that the applicants are providing for their current pets. We always check vet references during our application process to make sure that their current pets are receiving quality care and more and*

more we're finding that the pets are only being brought in if they're sick or need to be euthanized due to illness."

Kerry Menching, President, **Grateful Goldens of the Low Country (SC)** reported taking in a 4-5 month old male who had been hit by a car twice after his people moved out and left him tied to a tree, then came back and turned him loose.

*We had a dog dumped at an orthopedic vet's doorstep, said. **Hermine Scolnick President of Everglades Golden Retriever Rescue (FL)** Big shock. He needed bilateral hip surgeries. I would count that one as an economic factor."* And Judy Hartlieb of **Golden Retriever Rescue in Nebraska** reported "We're seeing the same trend as others. We just had a pair of seniors turned back after seven years. The owner can no longer afford the allergy and arthritis meds.

Turn-ins with major medical problems can be very expensive for the receiving Rescue group and often involve a prolonged period of follow-up care. **Evergreen Golden Retriever Rescue (WA)** has had several such instances lately. One was a three-year-old neutered male with severe, untreated diabetes. *His family could not afford to treat his condition, explained Nancy Kiesler, President, so by the time we got him his blood glucose was literally over the range of the meter and he was constantly incontinent. Several months and many dollars later, his diabetes is under control and he sits quietly for his testing and his twice daily injections. He is now posted on our website and we are hopeful that we will soon find him a forever home.*

Impact on Backyard Breeders and Puppy Millers

In addition to the spate of family turn-ins, some Rescue groups also are being asked to take whole litters of puppies from backyard breeders who either cannot sell the puppies or cannot afford the necessary immunizations.

Hartlieb further reports: *We took in three dogs from a breeder who typically sells to pet stores; she said the store isn't buying as many and she lacks the money to provide food or heated shelter for these three. We wrestled with whether we should enable this woman – dogs are a cash crop to her – but we hated the thought of the dogs living outdoors in the Midwestern winter.* **Grateful Goldens of the Low Country** reported seeing an influx of Goldens being turned in by families having to make choices between feeding their child or the dog. *Of more impact, however, says their president, has been the numbers of back yard breeders turning in litters of puppies they can't sell. We took in 3 litters in less than three weeks all of which had serious health issues.* Sandy Sumner, Board member for **Mid-Florida Golden Retriever Rescue** corroborated this trend saying: *We just got in five from Jacksonville. They are either too "old" at five months old or they are not selling so they are calling us."*

Foothills Golden Retriever Rescue (NC) staff reported taking in three Goldens, ages 5 to 7, that a breeder had turned into a shelter. All were found to have had seizures, one is

heartworm positive and also had to have a cancerous tumor removed. Soon thereafter, they picked up three more dogs in one week who were turned into a shelter by a breeder who couldn't get rid of them... a 6 month old female, a young male and a 4 year old female who was pregnant.

And puppy millers are having difficulty moving their dogs into pet stores as well. From Beryl Board, Co-Executive Director of **Retrieve a Golden of Minnesota** comes this comment: *A month ago we got a phone call from a puppy mill breeder who said to come and get every dog on his property and what we couldn't get by Sunday morning he was going to shoot. We partnered with another rescue, packed up and went to South Dakota. I ended up loading 27 dogs that day, talking the guy out of his son's pet lab and his wife's little poodle to boot. He told us it just wasn't profitable any more. . the "darn" brokers weren't paying cuz they couldn't get rid of them."*

Sick as this sounds, folks, please take heart in the fact that the brokers cannot sell the puppies hopefully because of the work we are doing to spread the word about the horror, legislate mills and shut down pet stores."

Aid for People AND their Pets

Many Rescue presidents reported owner turn-ins coming as a result of people being forced out of homes into apartments where the owners were unable to take dogs.

One Rescue group is taking truly humanitarian steps to ease the pain for economically-stressed families. Adopt a Golden of Atlanta paid the pet deposit (for an apartment) so the family could keep their senior Golden. They also took in a pair of Golden Retrievers from an elderly couple who lost their farm and were obliged to move to a retirement home. The couple's Golden Retrievers were lovingly adopted by a family willing to take them for visits with their former owners in the retirement home.

Foothills Golden Retriever Rescue also operates a Meals on Wheels Critter Food Program to supplement the nutrition program for the elderly with nutrition for their pets. Elderly who can't afford dog food often short-change themselves to give their own food to their pet.

Carol Allen, National Rescue Committee chair has always said that rescue is both a canine service and a human service. That is borne out by the remarks of Jody Jones, President and Founder of **Homeward Bound Golden Retriever Rescue and Sanctuary (CA)**. She states: *So much of what we've dealt with in rescue during the last year has been grief counseling for the people who have lost their homes and now their dogs. We're getting so many wonderful dogs who have been loved family companions, having to be handed off to "rescue" to save their lives. So many tears on both sides.*

State legislatures taking action

In many states, animals are considered property and therefore cannot be removed by realtors or bank owners when properties are foreclosed. This led to reports of horrendous instances where dogs and cats died in empty premises. California was the first state to act upon the problem enacting California Assembly Bill 2949 which took effect January 1, 2009. This act requires property owners including banks or other corporate entities to immediately notify animal control officials when animals are abandoned at foreclosed properties. Similarly Illinois recently passed House Bill 5076 which contains “Good Samaritan” provisions for individuals who rescue or provide care for injured animals in emergencies or disasters.

The Massachusetts Society of Prevention and Cruelty to Animals has State-Police Academy trained law enforcement officers that investigate animal cruelty and “willful abandonment” of a pet is considered animal cruelty. Owners leaving their pets abandoned are punishable by up to five years in prison and up to \$2500 in fines. Other states are recognizing the problem but have been slow to address the issue with concrete measures to protect abandoned foreclosure pets.

Increased intake, decreased donations

In the wake of the increase in intakes, many Rescue groups also report that donations are down forcing them to try to care for more dogs with less money. Adoption applications, and therefore revenues, also are down in some areas as would-be adopters hesitate to take on additional financial commitments.

Mel Shyavitz, Adoption Coordinator for **As Good As Gold Golden Retriever Rescue of Northern Illinois** reported that more applicants want guarantees that there is nothing wrong with the dog, or they are unwilling to take on a dog with any kind of medical issue that will cost them money. **Foothills Golden Retriever Rescue** likewise indicated that placement of dogs with chronic health issues such as ear and skin problems were now difficult. *Although adopters have shown interest in these dogs, Shyavitz reports, they shy away from adopting them because of the long-term financial concern.*

Still other financial impacts include volunteers finding it difficult to make transportation runs due to gasoline prices or being forced to take on a second job to make ends meet, thereby reducing hours available for their volunteer Rescue work.

What you can do to help

There is a role for everyone in the Golden community to help Golden Retrievers in need during these difficult economic times.

- (1) Contact your local Golden Retriever Rescue group (a complete list may be found on the National Rescue Committee website www.grca-nrc.org) to ascertain their needs for foster care, transportation, and donations.

- (2) If you can't offer hands-on assistance, send a check to the Golden Retriever Foundation April Fund www.goldenretrieverfoundation.org to help provide veterinary bill assistance to Golden Rescue organizations facing rising costs.
- (3) Or send a check to the Goldstock Fund (www.goldstock.org.) another 501© 3 charitable foundation supporting Golden Retriever Rescue groups in a variety of ways.

Most importantly, do SOMETHING because hundreds of Goldens are losing their homes and are in need of loving care.