



Christine Haslet with just a few of Devore's little dogs she has saved

Christine Haslet: Saving one Devore Shelter dog at a time

- By [Sharon Gilbert](#), Palm Springs Animal Welfare Examiner

(San Bernardino) - Perhaps they do it because they once knew the feeling of being alone and scared themselves. Maybe their hearts are touched into action by those terrified eyes staring back at them through the cold, stainless steel bars that desperately hope someone, anyone, will come to rescue and love them half as much as they will love in return. Whatever the reason, animal rescuers know first-hand the rewards, and heartache, of helping those of God's creatures that others have forgotten, neglected, and left to be killed.

Rescuers must have hearts of gold and emotions of steel to deal with the death and abuse they witness with each new day. From uncaring shelter workers to backyard breeders and puppy mill owners who sell sick animals, or irresponsible owners who allow their pets to breed and breed again only to dump the results in someone else's yard to clean up the mess, they see the dark, heartless side of pet ownership.

Christine Haslet is one such animal rescuer. She realized a need and set her sights on

making change in a system that is mostly uncaring and selfish and, often times, corrupt to the core. She picked the worst of the worst of [Southern California](#)'s high-kill animal shelters to "reform," the infamous Devore Shelter.

The Devore Shelter is in the heart of Southern California in [San Bernardino County](#).

Most residents have driven by it on their way to Las Vegas, the Colorado River, or San Bernardino County's lakes and mountain resorts yet few have any idea it is there. The facility has little signage. It is hidden from view and the county's politicians prefer it stay like that as Christine has learned the hard way.

With the shelter out of sight, and in their eyes, out of mind, county elected officials hope no one will notice how few of the animals they take into their care and control make it out alive. But that was before the Internet. And before Christine and others like her realized the impact social media can have in shining light on intentionally concealed atrocities.

Christine learned of Devore through a friend and rescuer who had just pulled seven dogs. Christine adopted one of those seven. But as she heard the story of Devore, she knew she had to do more. Haslet says of her first personal experience with Devore, "I made the trek nearly two hours away with a seasoned rescuer. I brought home four dogs that day."

"I thought at the time, after my visit, I could just pop up there, make a little appointment with the Director, offer to take photos, walk dogs, whatever they needed. In the meantime, I had put together a list of 30 volunteers. I thought the shelter was just in a bad way and they could use some help. Much to my horror, they told me they didn't need my help or anyone's help. They were quite content and satisfied to continue to kill two-thirds of the animals they brought in. I couldn't believe my ears. They were turning away free help because they didn't need it.

"I started a website, a Facebook page, wrote letters, visited Best Friends Animal Sanctuary in Utah, attended some classes, spoke with Cesar Milan, and contacted Tom Hayden (author of California's shelter laws). I talked to reporters and made a presentation to the Board of Supervisors but nobody seemed to care. **NOBODY CARED** about the animals that were being killed, thousands of them, tens of thousands of them . . . healthy adoptable dogs and cats. Devore has a 25 percent adoption rate. For every dog or cat adopted, three others are killed at the hands of a taxpayer-funded shelter worker."

San Bernardino County is well into its second decade of corruption probes, having had the Federal Bureau of Investigation raid four times since last year with more raids and indictments expected. The local media has had its hands full covering the latest arrest, reporting on the most recent court appearance, or determining the extent of a bribery, money laundering, or extortion charge to care about the plight of homeless animals. As hard as Christine and a host of other rescuers have tried to get attention, the deplorable conditions have been kept out of mainstream media. That is until Examiners learned of these poor animals and those, like Christine, who are trying to save them.

A fiery redhead, Christine is not one to give up because others say “No.” “Out of extreme frustration, I decided to put the political side of the issue on the back burner. I felt as though I was spinning my wheels. I knew in my heart of hearts that pulling one dog at a time was not the answer to solving this huge problem . . . the system is the problem. But in another strange way, saving one dog at a time WAS the answer! I began to pull dogs one by one. With my husband Steve's help, and our own money, we started then to pull four, then six.

“We got our real estate agent to sponsor our adoption events. She bought us a beautiful tent and signs for adoption events. We approached places to let us hold adoption events. We received a donation for our liability insurance so that we would be able to do events.

"So between our weddings (she is a wedding photographer whose clientele often wish to include their dogs in their weddings), we care for dogs, run to the vet, do adoption events, post on the Internet, keep our Facebook page up, photograph the dogs . . . and LOVE most every minute of it. So far this year we have rescued and saved 70 dogs that would have been euthanized without a second thought.

“Yes, our neighbors have complained a little, but overall we have been overwhelmed with the new friends we have made, the support, the donations, the volunteer help, the love and care that has almost magically appeared from nowhere. We thought we were giving ‘til it hurt . . . but then the strangest thing happened. We got more than we could ever give. The look in a dog’s eye, and a nuzzle when you connect and they know you have saved them.

"There are nights of kennel cough, escaping dogs, fleas, staying up all night to nurse puppies with a bottle . . . unplanned trips to the vet, unplanned dog fights. But when you deliver a dog to its new family—have someone burst in to tears when you bring them their new dog, or receive a photo of one of your pups on a sailboat or in a Hollywood screen writer's office . . . you know it's all worth it!"

Christine credits her years of being a small business owner for her ability to get to the

heart of the problem and build an organization to address the issues she sees. She is also thankful for the years she spent as a registered nurse as they have come in handy when nursing a kennel of sick pups back to health. Christine is a passionate fighter when she believes in a cause. Nothing happens as quickly as she would like, but little changes are taking place. Devore staff knows she is going nowhere. Baby steps are being made.

Early on, Christine created "[Friends of Devore Shelter Dogs](#)" on Facebook and quickly achieved over 1400 "likes." In July, Christine and her husband were able to form a 501 (c)(3) and officially became "[LuckyPupDogRescue.com](#)." "We look forward to building our rescue and getting the 'strays' out of our home into a 'real' rescue center, where we have a place to rescue many, many more dogs and we can have on-site adoption events. It doesn't get any better than that."

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