

Volunteer spotlight: 'Any time you get your hands on a dog is good'



By **William Hageman**

OCTOBER 13, 2014, 2:11 PM

Photo courtesy of Jackie Limosani

When two of Jackie Limosani's dogs were ill, she did some homework and became familiar with alternative pet therapies. She is now a certified canine massage therapist, combining her love of dogs with her desire to help shelters and rescues.

"Any time you get your hands on a dog is good. Any touch is good," says Limosani, who started Pawsitively Peaceful Canine Massage and who also volunteers with numerous shelters and rescues, providing massage therapy for their dogs and giving massages at fundraising events.

"I still have a day job (in the human resources office of an elementary school district) that pays the bills," she says. "I do this on my weekends."

Limosani discussed her vocation in a recent conversation. Here is an edited version:

Q: How many dogs do you have?

A: Three at the moment. All standard poodles. Oscar, who is 7; my older girl Bailey was 10 on Sept. 30; and Elise, who just turned 3 in April. I got her Valentine's Day weekend.

Q: How are they part of what you do?

A: Bailey and Molly, my other dog, who passed away in January, had pancreatitis. The doctor taught me to (administer) subcutaneous fluids. But then I studied more. Acupuncture. I wanted to know what else to do for them and help their quality of life. That's how I got started.

Q: What shelters do you work with?

A: Most of them are foster-based. The one I became very involved with is Ceasers Heaven Rescue. I work also with Chicago Pet Rescue. A new one I just recently started with is Best Friends FURRever. Those three are the ones I've done hands-on stuff with. Other ones done events with are Second City Canine Rescue, the Almost Home Foundation, Wright-Way Rescue, Young At Heart rescue, Midwest Greyhound Adoption.

Q: Have you always been a dog person?

A: I've always been very passionate about dogs. It took me the first 10 years of my life to convince my parents (to get a dog) because my mother was allergic. . . . My love affair with dogs has been forever. Back when I was growing up there were no vet techs or massage therapy. It's boomed over the years. So I have found my niche.

Q: Do you only work on dogs?

A: Yes, canine massage. Cats are a totally different animal, if you pardon the pun. They're not like dogs ... I don't know anyone who does cat massage.

Q: What does your work do for you, personally?

A: For me it's paying it forward. I have two rescues. Whether it's raising money (for rescue organizations) or working at events calming (dogs) down.

Q: What does your massage do for the animals?

A There were puppies I've had literally passed out on my table. They were so calm they fell asleep. People come over, You did that? Must be magic. Not really. And it showed a better side of them because there's a lot of stress and noise and people (at the adoption events). If you calm them it shows them in a better light.

Q: You're a member of the National Board of Certification for Animal Acupressure and Massage (nbcaam.org). But you keep your continuing education current.

A: Friday, Saturday and Sunday I was at a three-day seminar doing an intense workshop in dog aggression. In my business I don't come across a lot of aggression, but everything I learn helps me with dogs. . . . Aroma therapy, Acupressure, all these things kind of enhance canine massage. A lot of these different things I do make me better rounded. To me it's all about the dog, whether it's a puppy or an end of life dog. Anything I can do to help, calm them or end their pain or suffering.

Q: Where does your compassion come from?

A: It's funny. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. My dad was a doctor. Doing what I'm doing now in a way, it's like I'm trying to help, trying to heal, trying to do something better. Granted, it's animals not humans, but that's my trek.

Q: What is the process like, for the human and the dog?

A: Usually what I do first, if I have enough time, I send a little informational sheet (asking for) information on the dog. Why are you coming to me? What's the issue? Some have arthritis, some are old. So I kind of know what I'm doing. So when I go to the homes – there's less stress for a dog in their own environment – I talk to the person first, gently approach the dog, let him sniff me, and I look at their body language. I gently put a hand on their shoulder so they're used to my having a hand on them. Then I'll gently glide over them, make sure there's no reaction, no pain. I check for areas of tightness; of heat, which could be inflammation; or cold, stagnation. I look for areas where they may be distressed. Maybe there's a little bit of pain, maybe a little bit of discomfort. I start at the head, working the jaws, the cranium, I try to work the shoulders, neck, chest, down to their legs. I look for areas that are tight. I have to warm the tissues first so they'll become more pliable. I work on the body, the sides, the limbs, down to the back, and don't forget the tail. If they have arthritis in the hip, go gently, warm the tissues, and as you touch the dog you're moving the tissue, the blood. You're moving things manually in their system, getting rid of the toxins.

Q: How long are the sessions?

A: I work as long as the dog will allow me. Sometimes it's short, sometimes an hour. One girl, I was working on her dog and she said, If you get 15 minutes you'll be lucky. An hour and a half later I was still working.

Q: When you're finished, when the animal walks away, how have they been helped?

A: Sometimes they move a little better. Maybe the next day I shoot an email, Did you notice any changes? Any physical changes? And more likely than not they'll say, like (the owner of) one 13 1/2-year-old dog, He had more of a spring in his step, he wanted to go on walks. Another said, He didn't have a limp. Someone said, He acts like a puppy again. . . . I don't ever recall anyone telling me, No, there was no change.

Q: Are shelters – and the general population – open to massage as a treatment?

A: I've contacted a lot of rescues in the area, through their web sites or by calling them. I told them, I'd like to partner with you, this is what I've done. But a lot of them never responded. . . . I'd think they would be (interested). Shelter dogs are the ones who need it most. Their whole lives have been upturned, they're under high stress. Dogs are barking, strange people, strange smells and sounds. There are volunteers who come in and walk the dogs, but if there's more human interaction it helps the animals.

Q: You use your vacation as an example of what can be accomplished.

A: On my vacation last year I visited the Door County Humane Society two days. They had six dogs. The kennel coordinator would bring in one dog at a time, and she'd let me work. Some were couch potatoes, some very active. I came back the next day and the executive director told me the dogs were so much calmer that (previous) night. They slept well, and they enjoyed me coming the next day. That showed me that the dogs got something from this.

Q: And it can also help get them adopted.

A: If they're less stressed maybe they'll show better, and it will help get them re-homed. The saddest thing I see is a lot of older dogs being dumped at shelters because they're old or ill with chronic problems. I'm not trying to judge people, but it's heartbreaking for an animal that has lived with a family all its life to suddenly be in this new situation. Anything you can do to get them out of that situation, I'm willing to help.

For more information on Limosani and canine massage, go to pawsitivelypeacefulcaninemassage.com

