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## Gilchrist County starts adoption program for dogs

By Jeff M. Hardison © April 11, 2018 at 5:08 p.m.

TRENTON -- Gilchrist County has started a program for the adoption of dogs, according to information provided by Patrick Manderfield, press secretary of the Florida Department of Corrections, and others.



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**Above and to the right are the first four dogs ready for adoption in Gilchrist County as part of the new program. Titan and Little Pep are brother and sister surrendered by their owner. Suzie Q was surrendered by her owner and Paula swam the Santa Fe River from the Gilchrist County side to Branford and Gilchrist County Animal Services went and picked her up at a RV park.**

*Photos provided by Gilchrist County Animal Control Officer Erika Hudson*

The event on Tuesday morning April 10 marked the start of the program with the arrival of the dogs that have completed the two-month training program. The implementation of the program is a joint effort between Lancaster Correctional Institution (LCI) and Gilchrist County, with the help of community volunteers, Manderfield said.

Anita Barrow of Lancaster Correctional Institution invited the press to attend the grand opening of the Cuffs & Collars Basic Dog Obedience Training Program event on April 10.

Cuffs & Collars is a partnership program between Gilchrist County and the Florida Department of Corrections at Lancaster Correctional Institution's Main Unit. The program is designed to provide 8 to 10 weeks of basic dog obedience training to dogs sheltered by Gilchrist County Animal Services with the goal of improving the dog's ability to be adopted into a forever-family home.

The training will be provided by eight inmate handlers at LCI, under the direction of volunteer dog trainers in partnership with Gilchrist County Animal Services.

Those eight prisoners will work in the program for one year, and then eight other inmates will be given the opportunity. Each two months, more or less, there will be dogs who have graduated the program and are ready for adoption.

Four dogs have graduated from the program and are ready for adoption now, Gilchrist County Animal Control Officer Erika Hudson said. Three of the first four dogs were owner surrendered and the other dog was a stray, Hudson said.

Officer Hudson and Gilchrist County Animal Control Officer Brandon Butler are the entire staff of that department for the whole county.

Rescues are the main method for people to adopt dogs from Gilchrist County, because between the duties of cleaning cages, feeding animals, responding to calls for an average of 130 animals a month, and some number of applications of euthanasia, the prospect of those two workers being able to go through the process for adoptions is untenable as an



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added job description for the officers.

A “rescue” is an organization that helps dogs and cats that are abandoned by owners or that are strays, so that those animals find new homes where they will spend the rest of their lives.

The training program at LCI not only benefits the dogs by improving adoption rates and retention but it also helps the inmate handlers by giving them hands-on training experience and education in the care and handling of dogs, Manderfield said.

In this program, any emergency veterinary needs will be addressed with Trenton Animal Hospital locally. For scheduled veterinary services, the dogs will be transported to the University of Florida veterinary program. The UF program also performs the spaying and neutering at the Gilchrist County Animal Shelter via a mobile unit.

The program is primarily funded by donations for supplies and training materials, Manderfield said.

Applications to adopt the canine graduates of the program can be filled out through Gilchrist County Animal Services:

1799 NW 10th Street

Bell, FL 32619 Shelter: 352-463-4084

Shelter Fax: 352-463-3102.