

Paralyzed pit bull Red adopted

Dog's fans wish him well at party

BY ANDY GRIMM
Tribune reporter

Things looked bleak for Red when Chicago police Officer Brian Cicio found him.

The 50-pound pit bull lay limp in the kitchen of a third-floor walk-up in the Lawndale neighborhood, bleeding from a gunshot wound to his back. His 60-year-old owner had been badly beaten in a home invasion, and one of the assailants shot Red in the spine.

Cicio's assignment didn't require comforting a wounded pit bull. But he looked at the dozens of pictures around the apartment of Red and his owner, the food and toys and at Red.

"You could tell he was loved. He was friendly," said Cicio, who laid down a bowl of water, then stayed with Red for three hours until an Animal Control officer came. "It did not look good for him."

But that night three years ago marked the first lucky break of many for Red. His underdog story and personal charm won over Cicio, then an army of veterinarians, shelter volunteers and, most recently, a single mother from the Rockford area adopted the plucky pit bull.

"I had no idea he came with all this," said Red's new owner, Dawn Schaible, as

she stood among about 50 well-wishers, a handful of photographers and a TV news crew gathered at the PAWS animal shelter in Lincoln Park on Sunday for a farewell party.

During the more than two years Red spent at the shelter on Clybourn Avenue, he became PAWS' unofficial mascot and leading ambassador. On Sunday, Red scooted happily through the crowd, the tires of his wheeled harness — a sort of doggie wheelchair — rolling over the toes of the unwary as he scuttled from admirer to admirer.

Red's owner was unable to keep him after the assault, both because he couldn't carry the beefy pit bull up and down the stairs and because Red's paralysis required a caregiver who could help the dog relieve himself several times a day. In tears, the man left Red at Animal Control to be euthanized. A PAWS staffer making her daily rounds at the pound agreed to take him to their shelter.

"He's such a nice dog and had such a great story — shot protecting his owner — that nobody wanted to put him down," said Barbara Royal, a Chicago veterinarian who has cared for Red for free since he arrived at PAWS. "Everyone said: 'We're going to fix him.' He's such a wonderful symbol of what we do here."

Red arrived with a scar from his bullet wound and sores on his hindquarters from dragging himself around at Animal Control.



NUCCIO DINUZZO/TRIBUNE PHOTO

Chicago police Officer Brian Cicio, who found Red shot, visits the pit bull at his going-away party Sunday at PAWS.

After a few months of physical therapy that included acupuncture and weekly workouts on an underwater treadmill, PAWS volunteers donated money for his wheelchair.

Passers-by greeted him by name as he wheeled around the neighborhood for walks, and kids brought him presents and donated lemonade-stand profits to PAWS in his honor.

A few people even considered adopting him, but once staff outlined his ongoing medical needs — treadmill therapy isn't free — they dropped the idea.

Schaible, who lives with her toddler and beagle in Stockton, a small town outside Rockford, saw Red's profile on the PAWS website. Schaible had tended to a "special needs" dog who had recently died.

"Everybody goes for the cute puppies and kittens," Schaible said. "When you

see everything he needed, you'd say, 'Who's going to want to do all that?' Well, I figured, I will."

Red spent the last six months in a foster placement with Schaible, lounging on the couch with Razor, her beagle, and trailing Schaible's 2-year-old, looking for attention and scraps.

"He's got to lose a few pounds," Schaible admits.

Three years ago, Cicio would not have believed Red's biggest problem would be excessive snacking. The officer, a dog lover who helps tend to his fiancée's aging dog, smiled as he watched Red working the room Sunday.

"I can't believe this is the same dog," Cicio said. "It's just the perfect end to an amazing story."

agrimm@tribune.com

f t SHARE
THIS STORY
chicagotribune.com/red