

BAY AREA

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Photos by LACY ATKINS / The Chronicle

Sherri Franklin, founder and director of Muttville, cuddles at home with some of her dogs, since 2007, Muttville has placed more than 200 dogs.

SAN FRANCISCO

Dogs in their golden years get 2nd chance at Muttville

Nonprofit specializes in finding new homes for elderly canines — many are going to senior citizens

By Meredith May
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Estella is missing an eye. Ruthie has an inoperable tumor. Stimpie D has arthritis in his hips.

Geriatric dogs, they would have been euthanized if not for Muttville — a new San Francisco nonprofit that specializes in finding homes for senior dogs that still have a few good years left.

Founder Sherri Franklin has discovered a niche adoption market for old dogs among veterinarians, dog-gooders and senior citizens.

People like 78-year-old Marcel Doubovitch of San Francisco, who called Muttville in tears after her husband of 40 years died.

Franklin matched Doubovitch with an elder Chihuahua that had been abused — left outdoors in a wooden soapbox for several years.

Now widow and canine are inseparable.

"I'm so happy!" Doubovitch said. "Before, I would think of my husband and cry. I don't now because she's such a love bug — absolutely something special. I love her dearly."

Senior dogs and senior people go well together, Franklin said, because the dogs are mellow and match the

Adoptions

To adopt a senior dog, go to:
www.muttville.org

energy level of most seniors. They share a bond in the aging process, and it's common for adopters to select dogs that have the same ailments, she said.

Since 2007, Muttville has placed more than 200 dogs — about 30 percent of them with senior citizens.

Dogs come to Muttville from shelters, where they have been passed over for adoption, and sometimes Franklin or one of her 40 volunteers will rescue a dog from the streets or a puppy mill.

Many of the dogs are brought to shelters after years of living with a family. Sometimes the owner dies, but often people abandon pets because the family can't deal with the dog's increasing medical problems. Most Muttville dogs are older than 9.

"It's getting worse with the housing crisis," Franklin said. "People are losing their homes and relocating to places that don't accept pets."

Some animals are horribly abused — like the poodle that had to have a

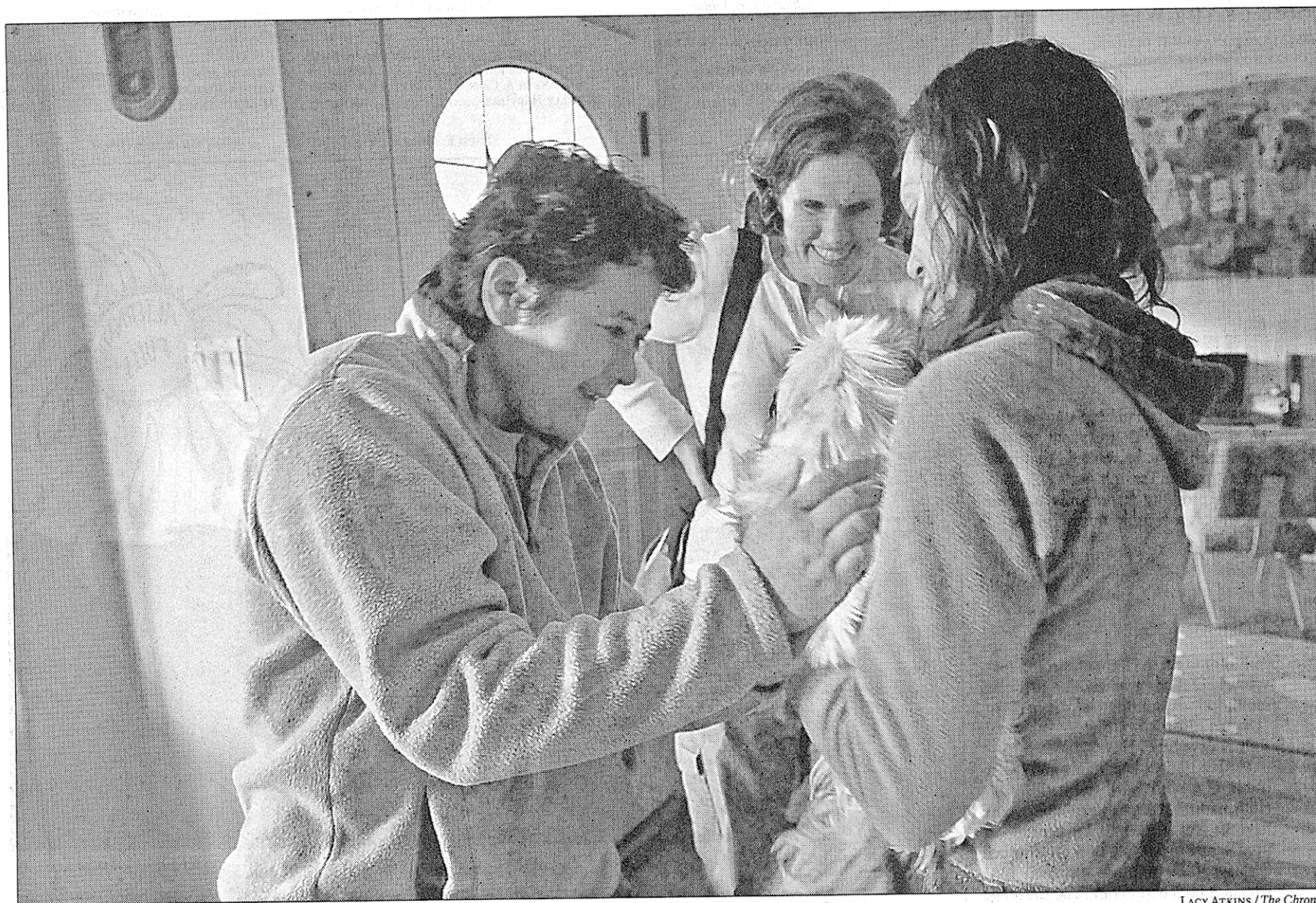
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Sherri Franklin receives an older dog that was brought by a volunteer to a parking lot in Richmond from an Antioch shelter.

"Muttville gives us a place we can go, because before, we had to beg people to take these dogs."

CATHERINE LeBLANC, 20-year volunteer for the Oakland SPCA



LACY ATKINS / The Chronicle

Sherri Franklin (right) introduces Panda to Kara Riley and Anne Reed, the dog's new parents; Panda is deaf, going blind and needs three eye drops three times a day.

S.F. nonprofit finds homes for elderly dogs

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was dragged behind a truck by a chain.

Franklin, a former vice chair of the San Francisco Commission of Animal Control and Welfare and a longtime San Francisco SPCA shelter volunteer, knew there had to be people who would take these second-chance dogs. She started caring for the dogs herself, and found she was so good at persuading her friends to adopt them that she decided to try her marketing

skills on the general public. She made a Web site, incorporated Muttville in 2007 as a charity, and since then the phone hasn't stopped ringing in her Potrero Hill home.

Franklin takes each dog to a veterinarian for a medical check-up, has it spayed or neutered and cleaned of fleas, and photographs it for the Muttville adoption Web site.

"Muttville gives us a place we can go, because before, we had to beg people to take these dogs," said Catherine LeBlanc, a 20-year vol-

unteer for the Oakland SPCA, who stopped by Muttville recently with a Pomeranian, two Chihuahuas and a black-and-white shih tzu.

Muttville placed 27 dogs in its first year. As word of Franklin's work spread, so did her inventory, and she's found homes for 175 dogs this year. Franklin has lined up 14 foster homes where the dogs can live until they get adopted. Her budget is big on heart and small on zeroes. She operates on individual donations and a few small grants from animal welfare foundations. Franklin doesn't

draw a salary and still works as a hairdresser to make ends meet.

She knows she's hit on something because every month she gets busier. Every day she gets about 10 to 15 inquiries from shelters with older dogs.

"It's horrible that I have to say no a lot, but I don't have the funding and I'm still a small organization," she said.

In mid-November, holistic veterinarian Anne Reed and her partner, Kara Riley, came to Muttville looking for a 10-year-old Japanese Chin they had seen on the Mutt-

ville Web site.

It didn't bother the San Leandro couple that Panda is deaf, going blind and needs three different eye drops three times a day. Reed specializes in acupuncture for old dogs.

Riley took the dog in her arms and knew it was their new pet.

"We want the dogs who have less of a chance because we can provide a good retirement home," Riley said.

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Schools face tough choices in new year

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She anticipates discussions and perhaps even disagreements, but she doesn't expect acrimony on the school board — something that has been a political constant in years past.

"Everybody feels like we all need to be in the same boat and rowing in the same direction," Norton said. "Everybody knows divided we fail and together we really have a shot."

Sometime in April, the board is expected to change the way it as-

"Everybody feels like we all need to be ... rowing in the same direction. Everybody knows divided we fail and together we really have a shot."

RACHEL NORTON
new school board member

signs students to schools.

The assignment process as it is now mostly ignores the proximity of a student's home to a school in the system.

That will probably change under the new board. Most members agree that the assignment equation must incorporate some kind of neighborhood component — perhaps allocating a certain number of spots to children in a school's locale.

The fear is that such a system would increasingly segregate schools, but the current system — meant to increase diversity — has failed in that mission, experts say.

The discussion is likely to draw significant comment from the public, much of it angry, frustrated or otherwise unhappy.

People might even throw some sand.