

Makeover helps Hinsdale shelter dog find new home

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Dogtopia of Oakbrook Terrace employee Illiana Rosado helps Pasta, who is 8, get her nails done as part of a makeover on National Mutt Day to help the shelter pet from the Hinsdale Humane Society find a new home. Bev Horne | Staff Photographer

Pasta's stay at the Hinsdale Humane Society had lasted longer than it should. By the time it was National Mutt Day, it was time to do something for the mixed-breed, mixed-color senior dog with eight years lived experience.

It was time for a makeover.

Through a partnership with a new doggie day care center and dog spa called [Dogtopia of Oakbrook Terrace](#), Pasta got the celebrity treatment and earned just enough attention to secure a new home.

The half-hour bath treatment and special attention at Dogtopia took Pasta from the shadows of her Hinsdale kennel, where she would bark for attention, despite being a calm, nearly bark-free beauty outside cage doors, to the home of Gabby Pacelli and Jacob Barret, where she's living a dog's happily ever after.

But the humane society's leaders want Pasta's good fortune to extend further to all overlooked shelter pets like her -- those who don't fit neatly in a breed or category, those whose sprightly puppy years are far behind them, those who aren't tiny enough to carry in a purse or cute enough for 100 Instagrams a day.

"You don't have to look for what a lot of people consider that 'perfect dog,'" said Kym Iffert, the [Hinsdale Humane Society's](#) director of operations. "Your average dog is really going to be the best one for your family."

'All the comfort'

Pasta arrived at the Hinsdale Humane Society as "your average dog" from a shelter in Chicago without a no-kill policy, Iffert said. Dogs from this shelter have come tagged with unusual monikers such as "Lunchbox" and "Sweatpants," so for a gentle, older, mixed-breed, the name "Pasta" didn't seem so bad.

"You spend 15 minutes with her and she'll give you all the comfort you need for the night," Iffert said -- just like a warm bowl of pasta, minus those pesky carbs and calories.

Pasta stayed at the shelter from May 17 to Aug. 1, the day after her Dogtopia treatment. The average pup lives at the facility just 10 days. Pasta's time there climbed to 76.

That's a bad thing, because it means Pasta, as only one dog, took up the humane society's space, energy and amenities for more than seven times longer than average.

With one dog unintentionally being a hog, others couldn't be saved from the streets or high-kill shelters during that span. Thus, the business of operating a successful no-kill shelter hinges on time and churn.

"The faster we can turn them over," Iffert said, "the more animals we can save."

Why the shelter sometimes struggles to "turn over" animals into adoption and a permanent home can be based on the quirks of the animals themselves.

Some dogs that wind up in shelters are easy to overlook as far as appearances. They don't strike viewers as an obvious poodle or an obvious Yorkie, so in their kennels they stay.

They don't tug heartstrings as an "ugliest dog" contestant, a "tripod" with only three legs or a puppy so small it's hard to imagine without a home, so the shelter remains their base. Oddly enough, Pasta's case proved mild-mannered behavior doesn't help, either.

"Because she's so good," Iffert said before Pacelli and Barret adopted her, "it's easy to pass her by."

Plus, pets like Pasta who happen to be what Iffert calls "dog selective" also don't do themselves any favors in the world of adoption.

"Dog selective" pups are friendly with some dogs but not with others. Iffert said this behavior makes it hard for families to trust a shelter pet would interact well with the other Fidos or Rovers they already have.

A kennel environment also doesn't do anything to show off an older dog's continued high energy, or a larger dog's gentle nature.

'Brings a smile'

For Pasta, the tide turned on all of these hurdles July 31 at Dogtopia of Oakbrook Terrace. The day was [National Mutt Day](#), an occasion recognized since 2005 to celebrate and save mixed-breed dogs, who often end up in shelters.

The time was 9:05 a.m. when, aided by a bribe of some peanut butter spread onto the tile tub, Pasta embarked on her full deluxe bath with a shampoo and hair conditioning, ear cleaning, teeth cleaning, nail clipping, hair brushing and air-drying. The package would have cost \$40, but as the star of the day, Pasta got it all for free from Dogtopia employee Illiana Rosado.

Pasta's on her best behavior through the deodorizing shampoo, the oatmeal conditioner and the ear treatment with Paw Brothers Healthy-Ear. She needs some more peanut butter as a bribe not to try to eat the air Rosado directs at her from a dryer after the wet part of her bath time is complete. And then she's done, looking roughly the same, yet a new dog.

"She came in looking great," said Matt Souvannasing, sales and marketing manager for the new business. "But we wanted other people to see that she's well-maintained, she looks fantastic. And this brings a smile to people."

Dogtopia aims to treat all dogs who come there "as if they're our own," Souvannasing said, so

extending the red carpet for Pasta came easily. After Pasta's honey-brown eyes shine out over a clean mane of black and brown hair, she gets to experience the social component of Dogtopia during an open play session with other dogs.

Her interactions during play showed the shelter, and its tendency to make some dogs more hesitant or more shy, hadn't gotten the best of her.

"She went in and she started playing with one of the dogs right away," Rosado said. "You could tell her gestures were very playful."

The special treatment at Dogtopia also earned Pasta some media and social media attention, which attracted Pacelli and Barret to her. They contacted the Hinsdale Humane Society right away and gave the dog a new home.

For owners like these, and after a long span of 76 days, humane society leaders were happy to register Pasta's microchip and let her go.

"(They're a) really nice couple who we feel will give her the best life possible," Iffert said.