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Subject: Many Thanks

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Dear City of Fort Pierce,

I am writing once again to express my deep gratitude for the support the city has shown to the shelter on Savannah Ave, and the manager there, Summer Rulapaugh (I do not know her exact title but, in my opinion, the highest title someone can achieve there). I am delighted to see Summer implement methods that are “outside the box” in order to salvage redeemable dogs who have been failed by others prior, and have suffered consequences through no fault of their own.

I think the community sees the local shelter as a place where animals benefit and are treated with grace by caring staff. The word “shelter” gives that impression. Somewhere along the way many shelters changed their names to Animal Control, which tends to mean a whole new way of thinking of things, often at the expense of the animal. Yes, I am dancing around the issue but we all know that I mean ridiculous requirements and expectations of pets/strays who have been faced with horrific circumstances and yet are expected to act unscathed. Anything short of some bar set is met with that animal facing euthanasia without so much as a moment to unwind and reveal true colors. For some animals it just means a modicum of kindness and healing begins almost immediately, others take time and considerable efforts.

When the locale learns that their local shelter is suspected of mass euthanasia, animal mistreatment and similar, trust is lost and things can get very heated, with extreme loss of faith and trust in government practices. And I can tell you from experience, the reputation that has always been whispered about the newly called Fort Pierce Animal Adoption Center (formerly Sunrise and other names as well) in recent years has been difficult to process and horrific to hear. However, I see that changing. I am seeing more and more rescues reaching out to help the shelter and to work with the staff. More importantly I see the staff, lead by Summer, also reaching out and making new connections with rescues in the area and beyond. Summer is saving animal lives. Exactly what tax payers want from their shelters. They want to hear things to make them proud of what is being done in their community...and they are learning that things are changing and have changed. I just fervently hope the city continues to support these efforts. In the long run it pays off...trust from the community is a whole lot easier and profitable and happier than when the community has questions, mistrust and fear about what is going on behind closed doors.

I am sure you are all familiar with local canine “celebrity” Kai. Kai was a young solid black German Shepherd who ended up at the shelter many months ago. I believe he was combative and brought in using a “choke pole” and was acting out extremely aggressively. Basically he would let no one near him safely. Yet Summer saw something in him, and she called me to take a look at him. I am used to seeing GSDs in shelters, and the anecdote about shepherds presenting the WORST in shelters out of any breed, rang true for Kai. He lunged at the kennel fencing and barked furiously, ferociously. Most people would very afraid and label him as aggressive or worse, yet I saw what Summer saw in him, a young dog with zero manners and a lot of fear. When I spoke to Kai he calmed down momentarily, and took treats very gently through the chain link separating us. I called in a trainer friend, Jon, who professionally evaluated Kai to see if he thought he could work with him. I was so happy to hear Jon use his expression about dogs he knows he can help when he said (meaning Kai), “He has a nice look in his eyes”. Jon has been training dogs, mostly problem cases for over 35 years and he can read these animals very well. It took months of training to get Kai ready to be handled by others...but only

I because Jon could get to see him only once a week or once every two weeks as he has to travel 90 minutes to get to the shelter. Jon said had Kai been in a facility to work with him every day, he would have been ready for rescue and foster in a matter of only a few days most likely. Jon, with the encouragement of Summer, not only worked with Kai but more importantly worked with shelter staffers so THEY could learn how to work with dogs like Kai, who need a little extra. That is a brilliant way to handle situations like these, Kai will not be the only difficult dog who will come in to the facility. The staff really seemed to like learning and everyone worked as a team to make sure Kai was handled by everyone. Kai caught the attention of a very well respected rescue early on, but they could not take him until he was heartworm free, which is why it took months to get him out with rescue.

I cannot thank the staff, all of them, at FPAAC for working together to get Kai ready for life on the outside. Not just the training and allowing us to be there, but the medical treatment for heartworm, his neuter and probably most importantly, moving him out of C building and making him an office dog where he was able to interact with so many other people and dogs. Everyone working together saved this dog. As it should be. But that is NOT how this facility used to operate before Summer and people had very poor opinions of what was going on there, many refusing to ever work with the place again. I hope Kai's story will make people rethink about their prior views to give the place another chance.

I sincerely hope that the city sees what an absolute gem you have in Summer and allow her to continue to work towards making FPAAC as accommodating to dogs as it can be, with goals for No Kill status...there are so many foundations that can financially help to achieve those goals but needs commitment from everyone inside and those governing outside the facility. I hope Kai's story makes you happy. I hope that hearing that people are impressed makes you proud. I hope you realize how much this is appreciated by so many. Thank you!

Respectfully,
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