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San Francisco Chronicle

**Animal lovers tout the goodness of pit bulls  
East Bay shelter, dog group show off nice examples of the breed**

Henry K. Lee, Chronicle Staff Writer  
Wednesday, August 10, 2005

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(08-10) 13:26 PDT Oakland (SF Chronicle) --

For Heather Scott, it hurts when people yell at her when she's out with her pit bull, Mikey, when she says all her dog is doing is "sitting there."



"I get nasty comments for no reason. It's hard to hear people say mean things about your baby," Scott said this morning at the East Bay SPCA in Oakland as pit-bull advocates kicked off an adoption program they hope will keep dogs off the streets — and offset recent negative publicity about the breed.

In the wake of pit-bull attacks on a Santa Rosa girl and the death of a boy in San Francisco, the East Bay SPCA and BAD RAP, a pit-bull advocacy group, joined forces today, putting mild-mannered dogs through their paces in front of news cameras in hopes of educating the public about the overpopulated breed and encouraging people — so long as they're qualified — to give them a try.

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"These are fabulous dogs with an excellent temperament and no medical problem," Rachel Long, director of operations for the East Bay Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, said at a news conference announcing "Pit Bull Hall," an adoption and education effort.

The problem is, nobody is adopting them, Long said. Animal shelters throughout the Bay Area are filled with "rows and rows" of pit bulls, simply because "backyard breeders" don't spay their puppies and that the dogs are later abandoned when people don't realize what they've gotten into, she said. Pit bulls are the most euthanized breed in local shelters, she said.

Donna Reynolds, director of Bay Area Dog Lovers Responsible About Pit Bulls, acknowledged that there "certainly has been a lot of handwringing, fear and misperceptions" about pit bulls because of recent headlines.

But so long as pit-bull owners adopt, spay and otherwise care for their dogs responsibly, there is nothing to be afraid of, Reynolds said.

To demonstrate their assertions, pit-bull owners showed off their dogs at a canine obstacle course of sorts, showing that pit bulls can be trained to obey their masters and do a few tricks, too.

Ana Poe, 28, of Oakland told her dog Paco to stay. He stayed. He also came. He also stayed calm as dog trainer Linda Chwistek circled him pushing a stroller carrying a Sponge Bob Square Pants doll.

Spencer, a 2 1/2-year-old pit bull, missed the second of two jumps but came back and did it correctly.

The dogs also behaved as volunteers clapped to simulate a group leaving a baseball game and maneuvered through flexible poles, weaving through them slalom-style.

The demonstration is proof that many pit bulls can be adopted and considered everyday household pets, said Oakland police Sgt. Dave Cronin of the Oakland Animal Shelter.

"There is a solution," Cronin said. "There is light at the end of the tunnel."

The news conference comes a week after two pit bulls in San Francisco and Oakland were euthanized after being set on fire and shot, respectively.

Pit-bull advocates said they were well aware of the stigma surrounding pit bulls after the June 3 mauling death of Nicholas Faibish in San Francisco and the June 22 attack of a pit bull on 8-year-old Annette Rojas in Santa Rosa.

But in most cases of pit-bull attacks, Reynolds said, there were unheeded warning signs that suggested that their owners weren't responsible.

To adopt under Pit Bull Hall, prospective owners have to meet BAD RAP adoption criteria and agree to a home visit. Some pit-bull owners were deemed unqualified because they had too many roommates, moved around a lot or simply didn't realize how much was required to take care of the dog, Reynolds said.

More information is available at [www.badrap.org](http://www.badrap.org)

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