

MICHELLE DUNLAP,

Founder & Executive Director



Michelle Dunlap, director and founder of Phoenix Animal Rescue, has always had a soft spot for misinterpreted animals, such as pit bulls, which drives her passion to create change.

Founded in 2003, PAR focuses on providing sanctuary, and ultimately re-homing, abandoned, stray and neglected dogs in the Levy County, Fla., area.

As founder and director of PAR, Dunlap assumes the responsibility of achieving set goals and objectives for the organization. Her daily tasks include working on fundraising, advertising adoptable dogs, networking for foster homes, coordinating vet visits, connecting foster families with foster dogs and matching applicants with dogs to adopt.

"I have always been drawn to animals," Dunlap said.

Dunlap started working with animals when she was 14 years old, volunteering at the Alachua County Humane Society in Gainesville, Fla.

She adopted her first dog, Chance, in 1999 from an animal shelter in Tennessee. Chance was a white pit bull with brown eyes.

"He was the sweetest dog, but it was so sad because people were afraid of him just because he was a pit bull," Dunlap said.

This peaked her interest in correcting the reputation of pit bulls as "bully breeds." She quickly discovered her knack for rehabilitating foster animals, often choosing to take in dogs with behavioral and emotional issues. This solidified her interest in animal behavior and marked the beginning of her career as a dog trainer.

She became known, in the local community, for her efforts in rehabilitation while working with Phoenix, a dog rescued from the dog fighting community. Her work with Phoenix inspired the vision and mission of PAR.

Dunlap received her master's in education from the University of Florida. Her career in teaching, coupled with her passion for animals, has fueled her efforts in animal rescue. While Dunlap may have left her career in education to pursue her passion for animals, she has never stopped being a teacher. She utilizes her knowledge as an educator to provide training and rehabilitation to benefit dogs in need.

Prior to the launch of her own rescue group, Dunlap worked as a volunteer coordinator, which allowed her to experience the managerial side of animal rescue. Building on what she had learned about running a rescue group, Dunlap founded Phoenix Animal Rescue in 2003.

This year will mark a huge step forward for the organization, as they launch their latest addition, the Rescue Ranch; a place for healing, rehabilitation and kindness on the journey to finding pets a forever home.

PAR will continue working with other rescue groups to lower the euthanasia rate at Levy County Animal Services in Bronson, Fla. Dunlap hopes to soon provide a mobile spay-neuter unit and low-cost veterinarian care for pets.

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Phoenix Animal Rescue is a nonprofit animal rescue group in Levy County, Fla. Phoenix specializes in pit bull advocacy and dog adoptions. The organization's main focus is to rescue, care for and rehome abandoned, stray and neglected animals in the Levy County, Fla., area. Visit PhoenixAnimalRescue.org for more information.



