

Rescue dogs hop a flight from Gulf region to better life

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Robyn Urman took one look at Joe Cocker coming off the plane at [Essex County](#) Airport and let out a sigh of relief.



MICHAEL KARAS / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

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Barbara Goodfriend of New Milford comforting a dog that arrived at Essex County Airport Saturday. The dogs, flown in by volunteers, were claimed by rescue groups and will be adopted out.

The 22-pound cocker spaniel was one of 13 dogs Urman, who runs the non-profit dog rescue organization Pet ResQ Inc., was expecting from the Gulf region on Saturday.

"How awesome is this! How good does this feel!" said Urman, who has rescued dogs for two decades. "It's incredible and we've rescued lives."

The rescued dogs were transported out of the Louisiana Gulf region and to the airport in Fairfield by several small aircraft and volunteer pilots with the non-profit Pilots N Paws. In all, 58 pilots helped transport 168 dogs to be adopted or fostered in the Northeast. Six volunteer pilots had landed at [Essex County](#) Airport by about 6:30 p.m., unloading the carriers for rescue personnel waiting for the pups at the Avantair hangar.

Some rescue workers came from as far as Rhode Island to pick up dogs. Urman was thrilled to see that all her rescues — some abused, old, or handicapped — were in good health as they were lifted out of the planes.

"No one realizes how the oil spill is still affecting lives, livelihoods, and these animals," Urman said.

As Urman took hold of a 30-pound visually impaired pug that was on her rescue roster, she offered the 3-year-old some food and water.

The dog was in perfect health other than her [eyesight](#) and would eventually find a home.

Hurricane Katrina was one blow to Louisiana, and the BP spill wreaked more havoc for humans and animals, said Urman, the manager of a [Tenafly](#) hair salon who was part of a volunteer effort in the Gulf after the hurricane devastation.

She established the non-profit Pet ResQ Inc. and the website Petresqinc.[petfinder.com](#) to save unwanted — and for the most part special needs — dogs. She specializes in dogs in the 20- to 30-pound range and relies solely on donations and volunteer efforts to foot the bill for veterinary costs, feed and transport.

"It's a rush, and there's nothing better than saving a life," Urman said before the animals arrived. "How do you walk away from a life? This is all about awareness. I usually do ground transport and this is the first time we're doing this with planes. It's a great, great collaboration."

In a press release, Debi Boies, the co-founder of Pilots N Paws, stressed that the animals are helpless because their owners can no longer care for them.

"These animals need help now," Boies said. "Many had families who loved them and are victims of the oil spill. Their owners have lost their [jobs](#), their homes and are barely surviving. They no longer have the means to care for their pets."

The National Council on Pet Population estimates that 9.6 million shelter animals are needlessly euthanized each year, Boies said. Since the BP oil spill, one shelter in Louisiana killed 900 in a single month, she said. Pilots N Paws hopes to decrease the number through connecting shelters and rescue groups with the volunteer pilots who are willing to transport animals to safe homes, she said. The efforts of Pilots N Paws and Pilots N Paws Gulf Rescue Flyaway are sponsored by GA America, Petmate and [Subaru](#).

"Volunteers are the key to our success," Boies said. "Without the pilots and rescue groups, our program wouldn't exist."

Barbara Goodfriend of [New Milford](#), an animal communicator who arrived at the airport as the dogs were being unloaded, was amazed at the effort of Pilots N Paws.

"This is the first time I'm seeing this," she said of the transport. "It's such a beautiful effort and the animals have arrived in good shape. Today is very celebratory. ... It's a celebratory feeling ... and the dogs certainly pick up on that."

For information or to help the Pilots N Paws Gulf Coast Rescue Flyway, visit pilotsnpaws.org.

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http://www.northjersey.com/community/pets/103226664_Rescue_dogs_hop_a_flight_to_better_life.html?page=all