

Fircrest woman adopts rare breed Spanish dog

She wants others to help persecuted breed



Photo by [Troy Wayrynen](#)

Pilar keeps a sharp eye out for wildlife and other creatures at Fircrest Neighborhood Park in Vancouver.

By [Paris Achen](#)

As of Wednesday, August 28, 2013



By Troy Wayrynen

Sherry Van Dyke takes her dog, Pilar, a 2-year-old galga, for a walk at Fircrest Neighborhood Park in Vancouver. Van Dyke adopted Pilar after the dog was thrown into a dry well in Spain. It's the first known adoption of a galgo dog in Clark County.

Eight months ago, Pilar, a snow-white Spanish greyhound, was starving, trapped more than 100 feet down a dry water well in Spain, where her owner had apparently left her to die.

Now, the 2-year-old dog romps happily through Fircrest Neighborhood Park in Vancouver, taking occasional breaks to cuddle with her owner, Sherry Van Dyke.

The Fircrest resident is believed to be the first person in Clark County to adopt a galgo ("galga" for females) -- the generic name for Spanish hunting dogs -- and the second in the state, according to the three main organizations that coordinate galgos adoptions in the United States.

The dogs are one of the most persecuted breeds in the world, according to rescue groups. They're generally viewed as commodities in Spain and are frequently killed at the end of hunting season. If they perform well during the season, they may receive a quick death; those that hunt poorly often face additional brutality. At least 50,000 are disposed of each year, according to Galgos del Sol shelter in Murcia, Spain.

In recent years, there's been a movement to save the dogs through local and international adoptions and education.

"Ninety-nine percent of the (U.S.) population doesn't even know about them," Van Dyke said. "A lot of them need to be adopted. They're wonderful pets."

Following on Facebook

Luckily for Pilar, someone heard her whimpering inside the well, rescued her and brought her to the Galgos del Sol shelter. The Sighthound Underground, a dog rescue and placement organization also known as SHUG, brought her to their headquarters in McLean, Va., in April to be adopted in the United States.

Van Dyke, who has long been involved in dog rescue and fundraisers, had been following the galgos plight. She saw photos of Pilar's emaciated body after her rescue and read her story in a post on the Spanish shelter's Facebook page. Later, she found out Pilar was available for adoption.

Soon after Pilar arrived in the country, SHUG approved Van Dyke to adopt her. It was the second galgo adoption in Washington state. The first was in Lynnwood in July 2012, said Telma Shaw of Galgo Rescue International Network.

SHUG, one of about three U.S. organizations that adopt out galgos, has adopted out 13 galgos since January, said director Michael Owens. The total number in the country is probably in the low hundreds, Van Dyke said.

Pilar arrived at her new home in the Fircrest neighborhood on April 20, Van Dyke said.

She is still afraid of men, but she has adjusted well to Van Dyke's other dogs, Van Dyke said. Like many other galgos, she's also gentle with children, Van Dyke said.

"She's just been everything I could hope for," she said.

Galgos, which have the elegant streamlined bodies of greyhounds, were bred to be hunters and coursers, according to Galgo Rescue International Network. Breeding also resulted in a beautiful variety of coat colors, patterns and textures. The dogs can have long or short hair with a smooth or rough texture.

While they're fast, agile and more playful than their greyhound relatives, they also tend to spend the majority of their day napping.

"They're the most gentle, wonderful dogs you'll ever meet," Van Dyke said.

Adoptions can cost between about \$750 and \$1,500 because of the large distances the dogs have to travel to their new homes, Owens said. SHUG charges a flat adoption fee of \$750 to cover veterinarian and transportation costs and relies heavily on donations.

"I know a lot of dogs need homes, but I don't think many of them suffer as much as these dogs do," Van Dyke said.

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